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Security Council

Sixty-seventh year

Provisional

6710th meeting

Tuesday, 31 January 2012, 3 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Sangqu	(South Africa)
Members:	Azerbaijan	Mr. Musayev
	China	Mr. Li Baodong
	Colombia	Mr. Osorio
	France	Mr. Juppé
	Germany	Mr. Link
	Guatemala	Mr. Caballeros
	India	Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri
	Morocco	Mr. Amrani
	Pakistan	Mr. Haroon
	Portugal	Mr. Portas
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Togo	Mr. Menan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hague
	United States of America	Mrs. Rodham Clinton

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 24 January 2012 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2012/71)

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12-21919 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 24 January 2012 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2012/71)

The President: Under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Qatar and the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, Chairman of the current session of the Arab League Council at the Ministerial Level, and request the Protocol Officer to escort him to his seat at the Council table.

Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, Chairman of the current session of the Arab League Council at the Ministerial Level, was escorted to a seat at the Council table.

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Nabil Elaraby, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, to participate in this meeting.

I wish to welcome the presence at today's meeting of the Ministers and the Deputy Secretary-General. Their presence is an affirmation of the importance of the subject matter to be addressed.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2012/71, which contains a letter dated 24 January 2012 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, Chairman of the current session of the Arab League Council at the Ministerial Level.

Sheikh Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. I thank you and the members of the Council for convening this meeting to allow us to report on the mission with which we were entrusted.

At a meeting held in Cairo on 22 January, the Council of Ministers of the League of Arab States adopted a resolution requesting that I, in my capacity as Chairman of the Arab Ministerial Committee on Syria, and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States brief the Security Council on the plan adopted under that resolution and that we request the Council to endorse the plan.

I wish to stress that our first and ultimate goal is to serve the interests of Syria, which entails protecting its sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity and ensuring its stability. I further stress the importance of ensuring the solidarity and unity of the Syrian people, harmony among its various components, and the protection of all its ethnic, religious and social groups. With its unique social fabric and intellectual and cultural authenticity, Syria is dear to the hearts of all Arabs. I address the Council today to brief it on the resolution adopted by an organization representing all Arabs.

We meet today under the watchful eyes of bereaved orphans, widows, thousands of wounded, detainees, displaced children, young people, the elderly and women who continue to hope for the support of the Security Council and thus to live a decent, free life based on right, justice and good governance. It is up to the Security Council — and its responsibility under United Nations Charter — to realize the hopes of the Syrian people. Indeed, we are entrusted with such a burden by virtue of our humanitarian responsibility.

At the League of Arab States, we have worked diligently, patiently and responsibly to find solutions that will help us settle the Syrian crisis peacefully. On 27 August 2011, the League of Arab States adopted an initiative to end the violence in Syria, launch an inclusive national dialogue with the opposition to prevent the situation from deteriorating further, and introduce reforms in a secure and controlled environment. The provisions and mechanisms of the initiative were balanced, transparent and objective. It was the only way to achieve a peaceful settlement of the crisis based on the aforementioned goals.

On 26 October 2011, at its extraordinary session in Cairo, the League of Arab States reiterated the Arab position in a resolution calling for an immediate and complete end to the violence and killing, the elimination of armed elements, and the rejection of a security-based solution in a bid to avoid further casualties and exacerbating the conflict among the various factions of the Syrian people, preserve the civil peace, protect civilians, and maintain the unity of the Syrian people.

The resolution called on the Council of Ministers of the League of Arab States to establish, at that session, an Arab Ministerial Committee — under my chairmanship and with the Foreign Ministers of Algeria, Egypt, the Sudan and Oman and the head of the Arab League as members — mandated to liaise with the Syrian leadership in an effort to halt all acts of violence and killing. The Committee requested the Sudan and Egypt to persuade the Syrian leadership to withdraw all military presences and launch a dialogue between the Syrian people and opposition in order to implement political reforms that would meet the aspirations of the people. The resolution also called for the establishment of necessary contacts with the Syrian Government and opposition in order to prepare for a conference of inclusive national dialogue at the headquarters of the League of Arab States and under its auspices that would realize the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

On 26 October 2011, the Ministerial Committee held discussions in Damascus with President Bashar Al-Assad. In a meeting held with the Syrian side in Doha on 30 October 2011, the Committee agreed on a plan of action that was welcomed at the resumed extraordinary session of the League of Arab States, held at the ministerial level at the League's headquarters on 2 November 2011. The agreement was annexed to the resolution. The plan confirmed the official Syrian approval of the following: first, to end all acts of violence committed by all sources in order to protect the lives of Syrian citizens; secondly, to free detainees held as a result of the current events; thirdly, to withdraw all military elements from the cities and residential neighbourhoods; and fourthly, to provide the relevant agencies of the League of Arab States and Arab and international media free access throughout Syria in order to report on developments there and monitor the situation. The plan called on the Ministerial Committee to conduct, in parallel with concrete progress made by the Syrian Government towards meeting its commitments, necessary contacts and consultations with the Government and various factions of the Syrian opposition with a view to convening a national dialogue conference within two weeks of the date of the adoption of the resolution.

Unfortunately, the Syrian Government did not fully or immediately meet its commitments to the League's initiative of 2 November 2011. Consequently, the Ministerial Council decided on 12 November 2011 to adopt a host of measures, including the imposition of economic and political sanctions on the Syrian Government and calling on all opposition factions to meet in Cairo for three days to agree at a forthcoming conference on a transitional phase for Syria.

After the idea of dispatching an Arab observer mission to Syria took shape — not to give any party an opportunity to buy time but rather to stop the violence and the bloodshed — the Ministerial Council approved, at a meeting held in Rabat on 16 November 2011, a draft protocol on the legal status of the mission, whose mandate was to verify the implementation of the Arab plan in order to solve the crisis and protect civilians. Should the Syrian Government fail to sign the protocol or violate any of its provisions — including those calling for an end to the violence and killing and the release of detainees — the resolution called for convening the Economic and Social Council of the League of Arab States to consider imposing economic sanctions on Syria.

The resolution was communicated to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and requested him to take necessary action in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations to support the League's efforts. On 27 November 2011, the Ministerial Council adopted a package of sanctions, including halting flights to Syria, that would not directly affect the Syrian people. At a meeting held in Doha on 3 December 2011, the Ministerial Committee agreed on the details of the sanctions and relevant action. It is worth mentioning that the Arab Ministerial Committee continued its meetings aimed at following up on developments in the Syrian situation; it met in Doha on 17 December 2011 and in Cairo on 8 January 2012.

Despite all those efforts, including contacts with the Syrian Government, the Syrian side resorted to introducing one amendment after the other to the draft protocol, and asking all kinds of questions, to which

the League of Arab States provided answers and clarifications, for more than a month. It was clear that the Syrian objective was to stall and prevaricate in order to avoid taking the responsibility of implementing its commitments, which reflected the Syrian Government's lack of political will to sign the protocol and commit to implementing the provisions of the Arab plan.

Once the fear barrier came down and the people started defending themselves in the face of military and security oppression, the Syrian Government signed the protocol on 19 December 2011. Immediately thereafter, the Arab observer mission — the first of its kind in the history of the League of Arab States — was deployed. It is not unlikely that the purpose behind the Syrian Government's signing the protocol is to enforce the military solution under cover of its commitment to the protocol. In fact, the Syrian Government has failed to implement major provisions of the protocol, notably those related to the immediate implementation of the Arab plan of action that it had agreed to.

In briefing the Council on the Arab efforts, I wish to take fully into account the Council's continuing follow-up of developments in the Syrian crisis, so that the Council will understand the reasons that prompted the Arab States to adopt their resolution, which we have been entrusted to convey to the Council.

At the last meeting of the Arab Ministerial Committee in Cairo on 22 January, a comprehensive review was conducted of the tasks accomplished by the observer mission based on its findings. That meeting adopted unanimously a resolution that included a unanimously endorsed initiative on an integrated plan for a peaceful settlement of the Syrian crisis that would be acceptable to and implemented by all parties in good faith and without stalling or reluctance. That resolution has been circulated among the members of the Security Council.

The plan constitutes a road map that is consistent with the Charter of the United Nations and is aimed at a rational, democratic, political solution to the crisis and a peaceful transition of power. It provides for the formation of a national unity Government within two months, to be chaired by a mutually agreed figure and to include members of the opposition. One of its tasks would be to prepare for free and pluralistic parliamentary and presidential elections, under a law stipulating the conduct of such elections under Arab and international supervision. The resolution extended the Arab observer mission mandate by one month despite the fact that the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States announced on 28 January the suspension of the activities of the observer mission, pending review of the matter by the League's Council of Ministers, given the serious deterioration of the security situation as a result of the escalation of the security-based option.

The League of Arab States began to discuss the Syrian crisis six months after it started. We have come before the Council today after five additional months of effort to push the Syrian Government to find a solution to the crisis with its own people, based on the resolutions of the League. Throughout our efforts, we have been eager to preserve the unity and stability of Syria as an important member of the Arab family.

Our efforts and initiatives, however, have been completely in vain, for the Syrian Government has regrettably failed to make any sincere effort to cooperate with us. It is unfortunate that its only effort towards a solution have been to kill its own people. The reality on the ground bears witness to the fact that the bloodshed has not stopped, that the killing machine is still at work and that violence has continued to spread everywhere. That approach was clearly articulated in the declarations made by the Syrian Minister for Foreign Affairs at the press conference of 24 January. After mocking the League of Arab States' plan as an invitation to internationalization, he confirmed the Syrian Government's rejection of the Arab solution and declared that the security-based solution was a necessity imposed by the situation on the ground.

The important question at this stage is: What is the solution for a people that is being slaughtered? The Syrian Government invokes the violence committed by armed groups as justification. Could it not be that the people are defending themselves after months of killing, detention and torture? Could any leadership continue its rule against the desire of its own people who are calling for reform? We must not forget that the crisis we are discussing was launched through spontaneous, peaceful demonstrations by unarmed citizens calling for rights that are enshrined in international covenants and instruments. Those demonstrators have faced live ammunition, heavy weaponry, widespread detention and flagrant violations of their human rights.

The Syrian regime is promoting the idea of a hidden agenda harboured by certain States against it. That idea is untrue and belies the position of the international community concerning the events in Syria resulting from the Government's policy. Many thousands of people have died and many detainees languish in prisons. The Government killing machine continues effectively unabated. Sadly, funeral processions have become scenes of massacres; schools have been transformed into military headquarters and even houses of worship have not been spared from the shelling. Clearly such oppression has reached unimaginable proportions when the throats of slogan chanters have been slashed, as the killers of Ibrahim Qaqoush did in Hama. Fingers of pro-freedom cartoonists have been broken; the fate of Ali Farzat in Damascus is a case in point.

The Council may well be aware of the adoption by the Human Rights Council of three resolutions at its sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth sessions, strongly condemning Syria for the flagrant and systematic violations committed by Syrian forces that may be considered crimes against humanity.

In its resolution 66/176 of 19 December 2011, the General Assembly condemned strongly and by a vast majority the continuation by the Syrian authorities of their serious and systematic violations of human rights. The Secretary-General requested the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities and to adopt a unified position with regard to the crisis. As for the rate of killing taking place in Syria, the United Nations declared that it was no longer able to keep count of the thousands of victims and would consequently stop doing so. A few days ago, UNICEF confirmed that the death toll of children killed in Syria exceeded 384.

I do not believe that anyone would accept such a number even if it were described as collateral damage. I do not believe that any one of those children was a member of an armed terrorist group. The Council may well recall that human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have condemned the acts of oppression committed by the Syrian regime against civilians and called for the International Criminal Court to investigate the perpetrated crimes. The International Commission of Inquiry cited in its report issued in Geneva on 28 November 2011 that the Syrian security forces had committed crimes against humanity. It reported extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances and acts of torture, some of which had been carried out in conjunction with acts of sexual violence.

The Security Council has taken landmark positions in supporting us, both at the national level in our attempt to find solutions to the problems of Darfur, Lebanon and the conflict between Eritrea and Djibouti, or at the level of the League of Arab States with relation to the war of Lebanon and the war in the Gaza Strip. We look forward, in the same spirit, to the Council's taking a positive stance by supporting the Arab position on the Syrian crisis.

Allow me to recall that in the past, I came before the Council with a solution to the Lebanese crisis that did justice to the occupied Lebanese territories. Subsequently, in Doha we embarked on the Lebanese reconciliation that with which all here are quite familiar. Today, the League of Arab States comes before the Council to request that it assume its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations to address the humanitarian tragedy unfolding in Syria by adopting a clear resolution that supports the latest Arab initiative endorsed in the resolution of the League of Arab States Ministerial Council in Cairo on 22 January, to which I referred earlier. We also call on the Council to undertake all measures based on the resolutions of the League of Arab States, specifically economic resolutions and bans on travel to Syria. We are not calling for military intervention; we are advocating the adoption of concrete economic pressure to bring the Syrian regime to understand that it cannot avoid meeting the demands of its people. We are not after a regime change, because this is a matter that we believe the Syrian people should decide.

The continuation of the current situation is a threat to the entire region and might lead to grave repercussions if we do not remedy it in a serious and effective manner. We at the League of Arab States have made sincere efforts to find a solution to the crisis and hoped that the Syrian regime would be wise enough to realize that its approach to governance has become obsolete.

Consequently, and since the Syrian regime has continued to use an approach that flies in the face of today's logic and that of the international community, we cannot but resort to the rational solution to the crisis that is set out in the plan that we have presented to the Council. We hope that it will gain the Council's

support. Only through this can we hope to do justice to the aspirations of the Syrian people, their aspirations for freedom and for the establishment of good governance.

We call on the Council to adopt the draft resolution sponsored by the brotherly Kingdom of Morocco. Otherwise, we will be sending a wrong message to the Syrian regime, one that encourages it to continue oppressing its people. That might have serious consequences for peace, stability and security in Syria and the entire region.

The President: I thank His Excellency Minister Al-Thani for his briefing.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Nabil Elaraby, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Elaraby (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, Sir, to thank you and the members of the Security Council for your invitation to participate in this important meeting.

The Security Council convenes today at a time when events in Syria are spiralling dangerously. This requires that international efforts be concerted with Arab efforts for a rapid, effective and decisive action, first to ensure immediate cessation of violence in order to protect the fraternal Syrian people, and secondly to begin, as soon as possible, the implementation of the road map for a peaceful political solution that rids Syria of its grinding crisis and achieves the aspirations of the Syrian people for change and reform — a move to a peaceful democratic life in which all segments of the Syrian people enjoy dignity and freedom, as called for by every Arab country.

The security situation is increasingly grave and urgent in light of the escalation that Syria has witnessed in the past few days — the ongoing acts of violence, the shelling and firing and counter-shelling and counter-firing that have felled many innocent civilians in the Syrian Government's clear resort to an escalation of the so-called security option, in complete contradiction of the commitments it took on in the Arab plan of action as well as in the protocol signed by the Syrian Arab Republic and the League of Arab States on 19 December 2011, on the mandate of the League's observer mission in Syria.

We therefore believe that the first priority now is for the Security Council to adopt a resolution demanding that all parties — I repeat, all parties — immediately cease firing, protect Syrians and support the Arab plan of action for a peaceful political settlement of the crisis.

Today's meeting has been convened in implementation of subparagraph 3 of Article 52 of the Charter of the United Nations:

(*spoke in English*)

> "The Security Council shall encourage the development of pacific settlement of local disputes through such regional arrangements or by such regional agencies either on the initiative of the states concerned or by reference from the Security Council."

(*spoke in Arabic*)

It is in that very context that the League of Arab States has come to the Security Council.

I should like to thank the Council for having so quickly responded to the request from the League of Arab States to inform this Council on the outlines of the Arab démarche. The issue has been set out in detail by His Excellency the Prime Minister of Qatar. I shall repeat some points but will attempt to be brief.

The latest decision by the League was on 22 January, on a road map for a peaceful settlement of the Syrian crisis. Before taking up the details of our initiative, I should like to stress some of the fundamental principles of the Arab démarche.

First, the fundamental objective of our initiative is an immediate cessation of all acts of violence against and killing of Syrian civilians, as well as the realization of the aspirations and demands of the Syrian people — demands for economic, social and political change, a move towards a correct political life in true democracy in which all fundamental rights and the rule of law are maintained, and a peaceful alternation of power.

Secondly, Arab States aim at taking up the Syrian crisis in an Arab context. We are attempting to avoid any foreign intervention, particularly military intervention. Thirdly, the Arab endeavour proceeds from the need for a peaceful political settlement and, as I have stated, a rejection of any military or foreign intervention. Fourthly, all the resolutions of the League of Arab States — all the League's resolutions — have always stressed full respect of the security, sovereignty, territorial integrity of Syria and unity of the Syrian people.

Our objective is therefore for the Security Council to support our initiative, not to take its place. The Arab plan is the fundamental mechanism for a peaceful settlement of the Syrian crisis, with international support and agreement from the Security Council.

In our approach to the Syrian crisis, we have taken up two fundamental pillars.

One is immediate action for an immediate, full cessation of all acts of violence against and killing of the Syrian people, while at the same time maintaining the right of the Syrian people to expression by peaceful demonstration and for the Syrian security forces not to confront the demonstrations.

The second pillar is a road map leading to a peaceful political settlement of the crisis through a national dialogue that includes all parties, all sects, all political currents and all segments of Syrian society in order to realize the aspirations of the Syrian people for a life of true democracy.

In fulfilling that endeavour, since July 2011 the League has taken several actions and has put a number of initiatives to the Syrian leadership. The most important was on 27 August. Mandated by the Council of the League, I personally handed it to the Syrian leadership on 10 September last year. Thereafter, an Arab ministerial committee — again, mandated by the Council of the League and chaired by the Prime Minister of Qatar — visited Damascus and met with the Syrian leadership on 26 October.

Based on that initiative and those contacts, the Arab action plan took shape. The Syrian Government promised to implement it, and it was then adopted by the Council of the Arab League on 2 November. The plan includes:

> "First, the Syrian Government is to put an end to all acts of violence, from whatever source, to protect the Syrian citizens; second, the release of those detained during, and because of, the current events; three, withdrawal of all armed elements from all cities and urban centres; and four, opening the door to all institutions of the League as well as Arab and international media to move freely in Syria in order to ascertain facts on the ground and monitor such events.
>
> "Secondly, with concrete progress in the Syrian Government's implementation of its commitments, the Arab Ministerial Committee on Syria would make the necessary contacts and hold the necessary consultations with the Government and all parties of the Syrian opposition in order to hold a national dialogue within two weeks of that date."

In order to verify the Syrian Government's implementation of its commitments under the action plan, on 19 December 2011 the Arab League drew up a protocol establishing the legal context for the observer mission. Observers from all Arab States and relevant institutions were deployed beginning on 24 December 2011. The mission continued to deploy to all areas where demonstrations were occurring in 15 cities in Syria.

The head of the mission presented his first technical field report covering the period from 24 December 2011, the date on which the team reached Damascus, to 18 January of this year. The report was transmitted to the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 22 January in order to inform him of the situation on the ground and the cooperation and consultations between our two organizations.

The Council of the League of Arab States decided that, in the light of the conclusions presented in the report, partial progress had indeed been made in implementing some of the commitments undertaken by the Syrian Government. However, progress was incomplete and therefore insufficient. It was not what was required or, indeed, what was wanted.

The resolutions of the League and the protocol itself refer to the immediate and complete cessation of acts of violence, the release of all detainees, the withdrawal of all armed elements from cities and the provision of unhindered access to Arab and international media. In that context, I should like to take up some fundamental points presented in the report in order to provide the appropriate temporal and political context.

First, the Syrian Government should have met all of its commitments before the monitors arrived, so that the mission would merely verify implementation. However, since it did not fully meet all its commitments, the task of the team on the ground had to change. The team sought to demand that the Syrian Government immediately and fully implement its commitments. It also sought to confront some painful humanitarian situations that could not be ignored, even though they exceeded the scope of the team's mandate. By way of example, the team delivered food to some

areas, recorded witness accounts of human rights violations committed against Syrian citizens, and assisted in the exchange of the bodies of the fallen.

Secondly, the report covers a limited and brief time frame. It does not address events during the nine months preceding the team's arrival in Syria, between 15 March and 24 December 2011. During that period, many events occurred, as did many violations that the team did not address as they lay outside its remit. That was not required of the mission. That must always be taken into consideration when assessing the work and findings of the observers.

Thirdly, the mission's task was very specific and, indeed, very complicated. As the Prime Minister of Qatar stated, never in the past had a team of civilian observers been dispatched to a State facing escalating protests by civilians calling for regime change. The mission was deployed to verify that the Syrian Government was fulfilling its commitments to end the violence and killing and to withdraw armed elements from cities and urban centres at a time when the political, military and security forces of that country were in control.

It must be clearly stated that the mandate of the mission was to verify the Syrian Government's implementation of its commitments, and not — I repeat, not — to bring about disengagement or a truce between warring parties, which is usually the case when monitors or missions are dispatched by the United Nations to any conflict area in the world.

Fourthly, the most important fact in the mission's report is the reference to the excessive use of force by the Syrian security forces since last March, which sparked a reaction from protestors and opposition elements. Paragraphs 71 and 74 of the report refer to the state of severe tension, injustice and repression to which Syrian citizens were being subjected. The opposition had taken to bearing arms as a result of the excessive force deployed by Government forces since last March. That is taken directly from the report.

Fifthly, although the presence of observers on the ground did not lead the Syrian Government to fully and immediately keep its promises, it nevertheless had some positive effects. For example, the Syrian people have been given greater freedom to express their demands, as was clearly evidenced by the increased number of protestors in many cities following the mission's arrival. Many Syrians found a mechanism by which to directly express their own experience and positions through witness accounts, which they provided directly to the members of the mission. The mission was able to monitor and record substantial information regarding the human rights situation in Syria. The mission was able to obtain lengthy lists of detainees and missing persons through extensive contact with the people in direct meetings and on the websites created by the League of Arab States for that purpose.

In view of the conclusions presented in the mission's report, having studied developments on the ground in Syria since the League began to address the crisis — and with a view to complementing the efforts to resolve the Syrian crisis without resort to foreign intervention or lapsing into civil war and in respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, and the partial progress that was achieved by the mission — on 22 January the Council of the League, meeting at the ministerial level, adopted a resolution in which it stressed several points.

The Council of Ministers underscored the need for an end to all acts of violence and killing from all quarters so as to protect Syrian citizens. It also called on the Syrian Government to release all detainees, withdraw all armed elements from the cities and residential areas, and grant access to the relevant League agencies and Arab and international media. It highlighted the need to recall the Syrian Army and any armed forces of whatever formation to their barracks and original locations; to ensure the right to all forms of peaceful demonstration and not to confront protestors; and to facilitate the mission's work and the entry of equipment, in particular communications equipment. The mission called on the Syrian Government and all parties of the Syrian opposition to enter into a genuine political dialogue under the auspices of the League of Arab States within two weeks of the issuance of that resolution in order to implement a series of initiatives.

The first initiative is the formation of a national unity Government within two months of the dialogue, with the participation of the current Government and opposition under an agreed leader. Its task should be to implement the provisions of the Arab plan of action and prepare for free, multiparty parliamentary and presidential elections, in accordance with a law specifying the procedure under Arab and international supervision and authorizing the Vice-President to negotiate and cooperate with a unity Government to

facilitate the transitional period. I should like to stress that the road map adopted on 22 January can in no way be interpreted as calling on the Syrian President to renounce power.

There is a precedent. I visited Damascus on 13 July last year and talked with the President of the Republic on the need for true political reform. The President said that he would entrust Mr. Farouk Al-Shara, his first Vice-President, who is responsible for the necessary fundamental reforms and that he would inform me of those political reforms. That is similar to the current demand of the League of Arab States.

Once formed, the national unity Government would state that its aim is to establish a democratic and multiparty political system that ensures the equality of all citizens irrespective of their affiliation or sectarian or religious identity, as well as the handover of power. The national Government should restore security and stability to the country, and reorganize the police force so that it can perform security functions of a civilian nature, with Arab States undertaking to fund such efforts in coordination with the League of Arab States.

An independent commission should be established to investigate the violations to which citizens have been subjected. Within three months of its formation, the national unity Government should hold free and fair elections under Arab and international monitoring in order to establish a constituent assembly.

In reporting to the Security Council on all such developments, I should like to state that immediately before coming to New York, I was compelled to take the urgent step of suspending the work of the Arab observers in Syria owing to the recent serious deterioration of the situation in the country after the Syrian Government openly declared that it would resort to a security-based option. That led to some observers being withdrawn until I take the matter to the Council of the Arab League in a few days.

As can be seen from the brief report on the Syrian crisis, the Arab League has consistently tried to find a peaceful political settlement to the Syrian crisis that would spare the lives of the Syrian people and meet their demands and aspirations. Furthermore, the League is fully aware that the international community's support for the Arab plan as the necessary mechanism to resolve the Syrian crisis is pivotal and crucial to its success and to achieving its objectives.

Therefore, allow me to reiterate that the League of Arab States looks forward to a supporting resolution of the Security Council that calls on all parties to immediately cease all acts of violence in order to protect the Syrian people and to engage in a serious national dialogue, under the aegis of the League of Arab States. Such a resolution should adopt the Arab initiative as a basis for resolving the crisis and should support the Arab League's mission when it decides to resume.

As Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, I must also stress the importance of the prompt cooperation of the United Nations and relevant international organizations with the Arab League in order to alleviate the worsening humanitarian conditions of the Syrian people.

In conclusion, allow me once again to thank the Security Council for having responded so rapidly to our request and for its support of the Arab initiative. I hope that such support will give a strong impetus to the Arab League's efforts and serve as an example of positive interaction between the United Nations and regional organizations.

I urge the Council not to fail the Syrian people in their plight. The violence and killing, whatever their source, must stop. We need a clear resolution in support of the Arab League's initiative. I would seek the Council's support for the draft resolution submitted by the Kingdom of Morocco.

The President: I thank Mr. Elaraby for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I, too, will speak in Arabic and am honoured to do so.

I recall that the Syrian Arab poet Nizar Qabbani, who is known and read by all Arabs, imagined, if not predicted, such a scenario and meeting years before his death in a very famous poem that begins: "Damascus, the treasure of my dreams, shall I bemoan to you Arabism or bemoan my fellow Arabs to you?"

I and my generation clearly remember that when we were at secondary school in the late 1950s and early 1960s, we used to sing the national anthem of the Algerian revolution in the morning instead of reciting the Syrian national anthem. We also used to give — or

donate, as we say in the Syrian dialect — our few pennies of pocket money to Arab liberation movements in the Gulf that were fighting for their freedom from British colonialism. As children, we were happy to donate our pocket money, little as it was, to help liberate our brothers in the Gulf from colonial control. That was long before the oil boom. At that time, Arabism was different from how some people perceive Arabism today.

Allow me to begin by expressing our appreciation to South Africa and to you personally, Mr. President, for your wise guidance of the work of the Security Council for this month. We take this opportunity to underscore once again the pride that we feel in the victory of your people and the peoples of Africa over the discriminatory policy of apartheid and in questioning the positions of some States that pay lip service to democracy and human rights. We ask them whom they supported during South Africa's struggle, which was crowned with success.

Syria is facing decisive and historic challenges. We wish for such a period to meet the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian population as a result of the will of our people, not of anyone else. While such events have broken the hearts of every Syrian, it compels Syrians of all affiliations and attitudes to choose the path of wisdom and to be guided by their resolute patriotic feelings so that the entire homeland, not part of it, can be victorious.

The Syrian people, who gave the world its first alphabet, are more familiar with the scent of jasmine than with the smell of blood in Damascus. The Syrian people have throughout the ages always been able to resolve their crises and domestic problems alone. It has never accepted any form of foreign intervention in the internal affairs of its homeland, Syria. It stood proud, refusing to undermine its cultural and national assets.

The Syrian people will do so once again through the participation of all Syrians to lead them away from the crisis and to contribute to the march of national reconstruction, with the primary objective of meeting the supreme interests of the homeland and nothing else, in an atmosphere of reconciliation among all. The homeland is the property of all.

In Syria we do not have a majority and a minority. There are only Syrians in Syria. I say the homeland is owned by all, and it is the property of all. It is a trust, even if some are misled and defy what is right. Syrian patriotism rejects external intervention and stresses that Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity are a red line. Syrian patriotism stresses that Syrians will stand as one against dissent and disorder, rejecting violence and resort to arms, while calling for reform. Homelands are built by all their citizens.

We Syrians have an opportunity to launch a sincere national dialogue and expedite the pace of reform in order to establish a genuine national partnership that preserves the security of the homeland and the citizen. That is the only way out of the crisis — a solution that responds to the legitimate aspirations and demands of the Syrian people without undermining the homeland. Future generations will hold accountable everyone who squandered this opportunity.

The Arab people would have very much hoped that the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States and current Chairman of its Council of Ministers had come to the Security Council to request the Council to shoulder its responsibilities to end the Israeli occupation of Arab territories and escalating settler activities and killing. How strange it is for us to see some members of the League of Arab States resort to seeking the Security Council's support against Syria — Syria, which has never thought twice about making the ultimate sacrifice in defence of Arab causes.

Those who believe that the States that I am referring to; who have always stood for just Arab causes in the Council and beyond; who demonstrate their enthusiasm for the Arab League out of respect for its decisions; and who believe that these States are with us are truly deluding themselves. The fact is that this enthusiasm has emerged in a context diametrically opposed to the rightful interests of Arab causes.

What is new today, however, is that the Arab League has decided to take its decisions to the Security Council, which has imposed hundreds of vetoes against Arab causes. What is new is that the Arab League has transferred these unjust decisions to Syria behind Syria's back, as it were, and without consulting with its leadership, in a way that runs counter to the Charter of the League of Arab States and paves the way for an ongoing scenario of aggressive interference in the internal affairs of Syria.

These plans have cross-fertilized with other schemes and interests of non-Arab States that seek to destroy and destabilize Syria. This has happened for no other reason than that Syria does not want to depend on anyone and will not allow its sovereignty to be

compromised, and because it insists on the independence of its decisions and on the preservation of its sovereignty and the interests and security of its people.

After some powerful circles imposed on this international organization a policy of double standards, which it incorporated into every aspect of its work, howsoever tacit or unwritten, we are now witnessing the onset of a new phase based on creating illusory terms of reference and on a policy of distortion and imposing false facts. Some try to convince world public opinion that those who seek to defend the independence of their countries — following in the footsteps of such great leaders, such as Simon Bolivar, Gandhi, Dmitry Donskov, Mandela, George Washington, Mossadeq, De Gaulle, Nasser, Emir Abdul Qadir al-Jazairi, Sultan Basha al-Atrash, Ho Chi Minh and Sun Yat-sen — are classified as terrorists and pariahs, working outside international legitimacy.

Those who are trying to preserve their country and save it from creative chaos and terror have become violators of human rights and killers of their own people. Those who win the support of the majority of their people have lost legitimacy and have to step down. It is really strange these days to find certain oligarchic States that sponsor draft resolutions promoting the alternation of power, the freedom to demonstrate, democracy and the protection and promotion of human rights, do not even have a constitution, let alone a genuine electoral system, and only exercise democracy through satellite stations and fancy conference halls.

Those same countries unfortunately resort to the Security Council to ask Syria for reform and for democracy. Syria had a parliamentary Government in 1919, one year after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, while Lawrence of Arabia was wreaking havoc with the destinies and resources of our region and trying to turn the clock back on obscurantism.

Syria signed the protocol admitting the Arab observers because we were eager to keep this issue under the Arab roof. Syria proved its full and unerring commitment to the Arab plan of action and the protocol signed between it and the Secretariat of the League of Arab States. The report of the observer mission (S/2012/71, enclosure 4) confirms that fact in paragraphs 37, 38, 39 and 73. It confirms clearly what we have been saying. It confirms that there is a misleading, deliberate, systematic and politically motivated media campaign to distort and fabricate facts on the ground. I would refer in particular to paragraphs 29, 68 and 69 of the report. The report also notes in paragraphs 26, 27, 71 and 75 the presence of terrorist groups that have exploited the legitimate demands of the Syrian people for reform to destabilize Syria, undermine its security, and undertake terrorist attacks against the institutions of the State and against civilians and military personnel alike.

Furthermore, paragraph 44 of the report clearly indicates that Gilles Jacquier, the French journalist, was killed as a result of mortar attacks fired by the opposition. Syria finds it strange that this tragic event did not move the French diplomacy to indignation, particularly given that Syria established a committee of inquiry to investigate the details of the event, chaired by a judge and with the participation of a representative of the French television channel at which the journalist used to work.

The Secretary-General of the League of Arab States read out some paragraphs in his statement. I regret that he selected some items from the report (see S/2012/71, enclosure 4) and left out others. I would like to read from paragraph 26:

> "In certain situations, Government forces responded to attacks against their personnel with force. The observers noted that some of the armed groups were using flares and armour-piercing projectiles".

The Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, who is a dear colleague, objected to requests by members of the Council to invite General Al-Dabi to participate in today's meeting. The report of the Arab observers was not sent to the Council as part of the documents that were dispatched from the headquarters of the League of Arab States.

The decision by the League of Arab States to go to the Council is but an attempt to bypass the success of the mission of the Arab observers and to ignore its report. The report, unfortunately, went against the schemes of some Arab and non-Arab parties who falsely claimed a commitment to the Arab role in settling the Syrian crisis while they simultaneously worked, using different means, to abort the observer mission while waging a fierce political and media war against it.

Certain Arab officials and some Europeans have questioned the usefulness of the mission, including the

Prime Minister of Qatar, who visited New York, Washington and other capitals only two weeks after the mission began its work, making statements to the effect that the continuation of the observer mission was useless and asking that the Syrian issue be transferred to the Security Council. That occurred while Syria was fully committed to the provisions of the protocol, despite a twofold increase in the number of Government forces killed and a threefold increase in the number of acts of aggression against public and private property. That was all due to instructions to armed groups from outside the country to use the mission's presence as a time for escalation.

Syria rejects any decision outside the agreed Arab plan of action and the protocol that it signed with the League of Arab States. It considers the resolution adopted by the meeting of the Council of the League of Arab States a violation of its national sovereignty, a flagrant interference in its internal affairs and a blatant violation of the purposes for which the League of Arab States was established. It is also a violation of article 8 of the Charter of the League of Arab States. Strangely enough, the League of Arab States requested the Syrian Government to extend the observer mission for another month. Damascus agreed immediately. However, the League of Arab States soon contradicted itself, ignoring the findings of the mission's report, attempting to transfer the crisis of an Arab country to the Security Council, and halting the continuing work of the observer mission.

The unbridled tendency of certain Western States to interfere in our internal and external affairs by various means is neither sudden nor novel. It has frequently and systematically occurred since the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 and the Balfour Declaration of 1917, not to mention the limitless support provided to Israel's aggressive and hostile policies and its occupation of Arab lands.

We all know that the international legal framework within whose parameters States operate is based on respect for national sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs. Those two principles are enshrined in Article 2 of the Charter of the United Nations, not Article 52, to which Mr. Elaraby referred, as well as in article 8 of the Charter of the League of Arab States. In that context, we stress the exclusive responsibility of the Syrian Government in the preservation of civic peace and security and in protecting its citizens from acts of destruction and sabotage undertaken by armed groups, not by peaceful demonstrators, in accordance with Syrian law as well as with the international agreements to which Syria is a party, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Regrettably, instead of respecting those established principles of international law, and in the context of feverish attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of Syria by co-sponsors of the French resolution against Syria, certain officials have suddenly fallen in love with the Syrian people after centuries of emotional hibernation towards them. Such people foolishly dream of the return of colonialism and hegemony through these resolutions. They concoct new terms to justify interference in Syria's internal affairs by misleading global public opinion. They are doing exactly what they did when they misled the world when 130,000 Libyan civilians were killed, and when 1 million Iraqis were killed under the pretext of looking for weapons of mass destruction that were never there to begin with, and under the pretext of promoting democracy. That is what they did with respect to the destruction of Afghanistan, under the pretext of fighting terrorism, or when they established clandestine prisons and detention centres in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib, under the pretext of promoting freedom.

We stress that Syria draws its strength from the strength of its people and that it will stand firm in confronting the enemies of its people. We call upon all those Arabs and non-Arabs who are fomenting the crisis and who are bent on exacerbating it to reconsider those policies and to stop massacring Syrian civilians. One cannot be an arsonist and a fire-fighter at the same time. We call on them to support national dialogue and the Syrian political reform process, as implemented by the Syrian leadership in response to the legitimate demands of the people.

By way of example, in February we will hold a referendum on a new, finalized constitution for the country that guarantees party and political pluralism as well as alternation of power. Parliamentary elections will also be held in the first half of the year, leaving the final say to the democratic ballot box.

In conclusion, we expect the Security Council to be a platform for encouraging dialogue as a way to settle crises. We do not expect it to create or aggravate crises. We believe that an exacerbation of the crisis will undermine, not preserve, international peace and

security. In that regard, we welcome the recent initiative of the Russian Federation to sponsor an all-Syrian dialogue in Moscow to find a solution to the crisis.

The President: I now give the floor to members of the Security Council.

Mrs. Rodham Clinton (United States of America): Let me begin by thanking Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim and Secretary-General Elaraby for their thorough briefings.

The Arab League has demonstrated important leadership in this crisis. For many months, the people of the region and the world have watched in horror as the Assad regime executed a campaign of violence against its own citizens. Civilians are gunned down in the streets, women and children tortured and killed — no one is safe, not even officials of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. According to United Nations estimates, more than 5,400 civilians have already died and that number is rising fast. The regime also continues to arbitrarily detain Syrian citizens, such as the activists Yahia al-Shorbaji and Anas al-Shogre, simply for demanding dignity and universal rights.

To date, the evidence is clear that Al-Assad's forces are initiating nearly all of the attacks that kill civilians. But as more citizens take up arms to resist the regime's brutality, violence is increasingly likely to spiral out of control. Already the challenges ahead for the Syrian people are daunting: a crumbling economy, rising sectarian tensions, and a cauldron of instability in the heart of the Middle East.

Fears about what follows Al-Assad, especially among Syria's minority communities, are understandable. Indeed, it appears as though Al-Assad and his cronies are working hard to pit Syria's ethnic and religious groups against each other, risking greater sectarian violence and even descent into civil war.

In response to this violent crackdown on peaceful dissent and protest, the Arab League launched an unprecedented diplomatic intervention, sending monitors into Syria's beleaguered cities and towns and offering President Al-Assad many chances to change course. These observers were greeted by thousands of protesters eager to share their aspirations for their universal rights and also the stories of what had befallen them and their families. But as the Arab League report makes clear — if one reads the entire report — the regime did not respect its pledges or the presence of the monitors, and instead responded with excessive and escalating violence.

In the past few days, the regime's security forces have intensified their assault, shelling civilian areas and homes in other cities. This weekend, the Arab League suspended its monitoring mission, pointing to the regime's intransigence and the mounting civilian casualties.

So why is the Arab League here before the Security Council? It is because it is seeking the support of the international community for a negotiated, peaceful, political solution to this crisis and a responsible, democratic transition in Syria. We all have a choice. We can stand with the people of Syria and the region or become complicit in the continuing violence there.

The United States urges the Security Council to back the Arab League's demand that the Government of Syria immediately stop all attacks against civilians and guarantee the freedom of peaceful demonstrations. In accordance with the Arab League's plan, Syria must also release all arbitrarily detained citizens, return its military and security forces to their barracks, and allow full and unhindered access for monitors, humanitarian workers and journalists. We urge the Security Council to back the Arab League's call for an inclusive, Syrian-led political process to effectively address the legitimate aspirations and concerns of Syria's people, conducted in an environment free from violence, fear, intimidation and extremism.

I know that some members here may be concerned that the Security Council could be headed towards another Libya. That is a false analogy. Syria is a unique situation that requires its own approach, tailored to the specific circumstances occurring there. That is exactly what the Arab League has proposed — a path to a political transition that would preserve Syria's unity and institutions. This may not be exactly the plan that any of us ourselves would have designed. I know that many nations feel that way. But it represents the best efforts of Syria's neighbours to chart a way forward, and it deserves a chance to work.

I think it would be a mistake to minimize or understate the magnitude of the challenge that Syrians face in trying to build the rule of law and civil society on the ruins of a brutal and failed dictatorship. This will be hard. The results are far from certain. Success

is far from guaranteed. But the alternative — more of Al-Assad's brutal rule — is no alternative at all.

We all know that change is coming to Syria. Despite its ruthless tactics, the Al-Assad regime's reign of terror will end and the people of Syria will have the chance to chart their own destiny. The question for us is: How many more innocent civilians will die before that country is able to move forward towards the kind of future it deserves?

Unfortunately, it appears as though the longer this continues, the harder it will be to rebuild once President Al-Assad and his regime are transitioned and something new and better takes its place. Citizens inside and outside Syria have begun planning for a democratic transition, from the Syrian National Council to the courageous grass-roots local councils across the country, which are organizing under the most dangerous and difficult circumstances. But every day that goes by, their task grows more difficult.

The future of Syria as a strong and unified nation depends on thwarting a cynical, divide-and-conquer strategy. It will take all Syrians working together — Alawis and Christians hand in hand with Sunnis and Druze, side by side with Arabs and Kurds — to ensure that the new Syria is governed by the rule of law, that it respects and protects the universal rights of every citizen, regardless of ethnicity or sect, and that it takes on the widespread corruption that has marked the Al-Assad regime. If this is to work, Syria's minorities will have to join in shaping Syria's future, and their rights and voices will have to be heard, protected and respected.

Let me say directly to them today: "We do hear your fears and we do honour your aspirations. Do not let the current regime exploit them to extend this crisis." The leaders of Syria's business community, military and other institutions will have to recognize that their futures lie with the State and not the regime. Syria belongs to its 23 million citizens, not to one man or his family. Change can still be accomplished without dismantling the State or producing new tyranny. It is time for the international community to put aside our own differences and send a clear message of support to the people of Syria.

The alternative — spurning the Arab League, abandoning the Syrian people and emboldening the dictator — would compound this tragedy, mark a failure of our shared responsibility, and shake the credibility of the Security Council.

The United States stands ready to work with every member in this Chamber to adopt a resolution that supports the Arab League's efforts, because those are the efforts that are well thought-out and focused on ending this crisis, that uphold the rights of the Syrian people, and that restore peace to Syria. That is the goal of the Arab League; that should be the goal of the Security Council — to help the Syrian people realize the goal of the future that they seek.

Mr. Juppé (France) (*spoke in French*): We meet today so that the Security Council can shoulder its responsibility towards a people that is suffering, in a region where peace is threatened by the bloody downward spiral of a regime gasping its last. The months-long silence of the Council is no longer acceptable. To its credit, the League of Arab States is here today to urge the Council to return to its responsibilities. France solemnly calls on the Council to live up to the mission entrusted to it by the United Nations Charter, by coming to the aid of a people and a region that want nothing more than peace and respect for their dignity.

The Arab League has taken action and done all it can to meet the demands of the situation by suspending Syria from the League, sending an observer mission and proposing a plan for political transition. I commend the League's courageous engagement in the Syrian conflict. I welcome the presence here today of its Secretary-General, Mr. Nabil Elaraby, and of the Prime Minister of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, and I thank them for the briefings they just gave us. I also commend the Kingdom of Morocco's decision to place a draft resolution before us, which France fully supports. I commend the collective efforts of all the States of the Arab League. I am well aware that decisions on the Syrian situation are particularly difficult to make and to put into action for some of them, if only because of their proximity to Damascus.

Today, I repeat, we meet to put an end to the scandalous silence of the Security Council. Indeed, I call it scandalous, and I will try to explain what I mean by that.

What is the current situation in Syria? A people has risen up to defend its liberty. Words are inadequate to describe the horror of the brutal repression. To say

that it is worsening or that it is tragic does not come close to the reality. According to the United Nations, 5,400 are dead. According to UNICEF, 384 children have been murdered. There are 15,000 prisoners, 15,000 refugees and daily torture.

I have long called some of the regime's actions crimes against humanity. The international commission of inquiry of the Human Rights Council corroborates that view. Beyond the statistics, the faces of children tortured, the bodies of women violated and the thousands of human victims of repression should guide our actions. The humanitarian situation is deteriorating day by day. What level of horror must be reached for the Council to enforce a stop to human rights violations and ensure free access to humanitarian assistance?

Every State has the responsibility to protect its civilian population. Not content with not protecting its civilians, the Syrian regime shamefully massacres them without restraint. That behaviour has direct consequences on international peace and security. Thousands of refugees are fleeing the violence, the sovereignty of neighbouring States is being violated, inter-community tensions are on the rise — all of which has a direct impact on the stability of an already fragile region. Even without reference to the responsibility to protect, those regional consequences are enough to establish the Council's responsibility.

How can this even be up for discussion? France has not stopped calling for the Council to work towards decisions and to put them to the vote. Those calls have been unsuccessful, with the exception of presidential statement S/PRST/2011/16 of 3 August 2011. Is that acceptable? I do not think so. Is it scandalous? I am certain of it.

Of course, we have continued our efforts despite the Council's silence. The European Union has 11 times increased the sanctions on the regime and its leaders. France has worked a great deal on that. We have established relations with the peaceful opposition. I have met many times with the Syrian National Council, a legitimate entity whose efforts to unify the opposition I commend.

However, the actions of the European Union or the Arab League, no matter how resolute, cannot replace action by the Council. By virtue of the legitimacy conferred on it by the United Nations Charter, it is the Council that can express authoritatively the will of the international community. The Security Council is the keystone of international peace and security. If it is to remain so, it has the responsibility to pronounce cases as serious as Syria's.

How can it do so? It can do so by promptly and with broad support adopting the draft resolution introduced by Morocco. That text delivers the Council's support to the Arab League, which, strengthened by the crucial involvement of regional actors, is currently the only body to offer a realistic approach to a political resolution.

There are two essential elements to the draft resolution. First, it unequivocally condemns the repression carried out by the regime, without falling into the trap of a false comparison between that repression and the actions of the opposition on the ground. If a minority resorts to violence, the vast majority of Syrians who demonstrate do so barehanded in the streets, as compared with the indiscriminate violence of the regime. We respectfully pay tribute to those Syrian men and women who every day march for their freedom, knowing that the repression's bullets could kill them at any moment.

Because it was mentioned, I want to honour the memory of Gilles Jacquier, the French journalist killed as he carried out his work. I will not allow his death to be exploited. The Syrian authorities had the duty to provide him all necessary protection; clearly, they did not do so. The report of the observer mission before us (S/2012/71, enclosure 4) does not go into the exchange of fire that caused the death of my countryman. Yes, the report says that the journalist was killed by lethal fire from the opposition, but that idea is not endorsed by the Arab League and we are still waiting for the Syrian authorities to shed every possible light on the incident.

The second essential element of the Arab League's proposal is that it offers the Council's support to the Arab League's initiative in all three of its main aspects: the demand for an end to violence, the call for free access for the observers, and, especially, for the first time, the articulation of a credible political transition process. It will be up to the Arab League to implement it. Our responsibility is to help it by sending the clear message to the Syrian regime that the international community is united in support of the Arab efforts.

Of course, we would have liked to see the Council go further, but we need a rapid response to finally open the way to a resolution to this horrifying

crisis. We are therefore prepared to vote now on the text proposed by Morocco.

Some have drawn an analogy with the conflict in Libya. That is a pretext. It is alleged that there is a plan for a military intervention in Syria. That is a myth. Absolutely nothing in the draft resolution distributed to Council members by the Permanent Representative of Morocco can be construed as an authorization of the use of force. The draft does not fall under Chapter VII. We are not preparing any military operation.

The tragedy of the Syrian people is sufficient justification for our action. Our goal is simple — to find a peaceful way out of the crisis that would allow the Syrian people to freely express their aspirations. Syrian society and its various components — and no one else — must freely determine the future. We have no intention of imposing a political regime from the outside. The Arab League offers the only viable prospect for achieving that goal. Let us grasp it. Let us rise above our differences and support the plan submitted today. Let us live up to our responsibilities and to the political and moral duty that falls to us from the peaceful uprising of the Syrian people inspired by the momentum of the Arab Spring.

There is no time to lose. In less than a year, more than 5,000 lives have been lost to the repression. Each week squandered means hundreds more deaths — each day, dozens more. In the memory of all the victims, I urge the members of the Council to vote immediately in favour of the text so that a political process can begin to put an end to the Syrian nightmare.

Mr. Hague (United Kingdom): I, too, thank the Prime Minister of Qatar and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States for their reports and their powerful words, and we are all grateful to you, Mr. President, for presiding over this debate.

Our task as a Council is clear: we must address the horrifying violence that has engulfed Syria for the last 10 months, which is an unmitigated tragedy for the people of that country and a real threat to international peace and security, and we must do so in a way that gives the greatest possible chance of a peaceful and lasting solution. The League of Arab States has proposed a way to achieve this, and it should be congratulated and supported in doing so. Its plan is at the heart of the draft resolution put forward by the Kingdom of Morocco, with the full support of the United Kingdom and, I think, with the support of the majority of Security Council members.

If implemented in full, the Arab League plan would lead to an end to all violence against Syrian civilians and attacks against Syrian State institutions. It would remove the major stumbling blocks to reform and give confidence to the Syrian people. It would start an inclusive Syrian-led political process that would allow the Syrian people to determine their future peacefully, and it would lead to a national unity Government and elections.

Syria needs a path out of conflict and misery, and, with this plan, the Arab League has provided one that is credible and viable. It has done so after three months of engagement, described by the Secretary-General, with all sides in Syria; after multiple visits to Damascus by ministerial delegations from Arab nations; on the basis of the work of over 150 Arab League monitors inside Syria; and in the light of their own deep understanding of their own region.

The Arab world is now asking the Security Council to put its weight and authority behind the plan. This is not the West telling Syria what to do. It is not the permanent members of the Security Council seeking to impose their view. This is the Arab nations calling on the Security Council to help address the crisis in Syria and the threat that it poses to the stability of their region. The Secretary-General has come here and urged us not to let the Syrian people down in their plight.

Members of the Council have often called for Arab leadership in the past, and that should be respected now by all nations of the world. Can any member of the Council today claim to be in a better position to judge how best to support peace and stability in Syria than these Arab nations themselves?

The draft resolution does not propose imposing change on Syria from outside; it calls for the Syrian people to be allowed to make their choices for themselves. It does not call for military action and could not be used to authorize it. Indeed, the Secretary-General has stressed that the plan of the Arab League specifically does not include any outside intervention. It does not contain coercive measures. It is not a Chapter VII draft resolution. But it should, in our view, put the leaders of Syria on notice that measures will be considered by the Council if there is not an immediate end to the violence and if the Arab League plan

continues to be ignored. That warning is important. For too long the Syrian Government has promised reform and continued the violence.

At any time over the last 10 months they could have stopped the bloodshed, they could have seized the initiative, they could have introduced bold and lasting reform that meets the aspirations of Syrians for greater political freedom.

But the facts over recent months speak for themselves. When the Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2011/16) on Syria in August last year, the death toll stood at approximately 1,000. When a draft Security Council resolution was put forward in October and vetoed here (see S/PV.6627), 3,000 people had died.

We believe that today, nearly 6,000 Syrians have died in appalling circumstances. That includes, as we have heard, 384 children. Between 30 and 100 people currently die every single day from the violence in Syria. They will be dying as we speak. Thousands more are enduring torture, imprisonment and sexual violence, including the rape of children.

The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic spoke about the idealism of children in his country in the 1950s and 1960s, without noting the irony that the descendants of those children, the children of 2012, are now being tortured and murdered in the name of their own Government. It is not acceptable to try to blame the situation in Syria on everyone else, from outside intervention to the Gulf States, to French diplomats, to Lawrence of Arabia — this does not excuse such repression and violence, which is shame on any nation.

We know about those crimes because they have been documented by impartial bodies of the United Nations. How long will Syrian families have to live in fear that their children will be killed or tortured, before the Security Council adopts a meaningful resolution? How many people need to die before the consciences of all world capitals on this subject are stirred?

The people of Syria cannot afford to wait while more false promises and half-measures from their Government are accompanied by brutality on the ground. There will be no reform or political progress in Syria while such violence continues. There can be no doubt that the violence is worsening; the risk of civil war is intensifying; and the threat to the stability of the region is growing.

With each day that passes, finding a way back from the brink will be harder, and innocent lives will be needlessly and wrongfully lost — deaths which the Council could help to avert by acting in a united manner.

Today, as I understand it, we all agree around this table that the Security Council has a role to play. We all want a peaceful political solution that ensures the stability, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. We all agree that this process should be led by the people of Syria themselves, with the support of their region and the international community. We all agree that the rights of minorities in Syria must be safeguarded and respected. We all agree that military action would not be an appropriate response to the complex situation in Syria, something this draft resolution makes absolutely clear. We all welcome the work of the Arab League. So, based on agreeing on all those things, now we must have the will to match such agreement by being able to agree on a draft resolution.

Even as we meet, the gravest of crimes are being committed in Syria. Responsibility for those crimes lies overwhelmingly at the door of the Syrian authorities. But if the Council cannot agree to adopt a resolution condemning the violence, backing the Arab League and enabling a peaceful resolution, then that failure of the Council will be judged by the people of Syria and of their region.

We should unite behind the Arab League plan, and that is what I urge all members of the Council to do this week. We should remain seized of the situation in Syria, returning to the matter if the violence still continues. To fail to do so would be to undermine the credibility of this institution, betray the Syrian people, snub the Arab League and fail in the Council's responsibilities.

Mr. Caballeros (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to begin my statement on a personal note. I represent the Government of President Otto Pérez Molina, who took office barely two weeks ago. My presence here today reflects our commitment to the United Nations and our intention to responsibly carry out our role as a recently elected member of the Council. We have come here fully committed to building consensus for the maintenance of international peace and security. We appreciate the convening of this important meeting in response to the request made by the League of Arab States in its letter dated 22 January

addressed to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (S/2012/71).

We are especially pleased at the presence of and information provided by Mr. Nabil Elaraby, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, as well His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, Chair of the current session of the Arab League Council at the ministerial level. We also listened attentively to the statement made by Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari of the Syrian Arab Republic.

In addition to the information provided today, we have previously had access to the decisions adopted in recent weeks by the Council of Ministers, the protocol concluded between the League of Arab States and the Government of Syria on 19 December 2011, and the text of the report prepared by the head of the observer mission, General Mustafa Al-Dabi. All of this has improved our capacity to understand what is happening on the ground, and has at the same time contributed to our growing alarm at a clearly deteriorating situation. The events of the past few days, and the decision of the League of Arab States to suspend its mission, have only served to heighten our apprehensions.

Once again, the Council is addressing the possible management on the part of the community of nations of the amazing changes occurring in the Middle East and North Africa. As with all change, especially when it arises from the grass roots of society, its final outcome tends to be unpredictable. We commonly affirm that those changes are the sole and exclusive purview of the citizens of each country, but it is undeniable — and events confirm this to be the case — that the wave of change does not recognize borders, and that whatever happens in one nation has an impact on the rest. This explains the presence of the League of Arab States in the case we are addressing today — the situation in Syria.

We have listened attentively to the different narratives offered on the matter, which, among other aspects, try to assign quotas of responsibility to different actors, domestic and foreign. While the facts of what actually is happening are sorted out — a task made more difficult by the lack of access to the media, and in spite of the presence until a few days ago of the mission of observers — two realities overshadow the rest. First, the toll of human life and the general suffering imposed on the population are on the rise. Secondly, the spiral of violence points at the real possibility of a civil war between Syrians. The immediate task at hand, then, is to put an end to violence and to reverse the trend towards even greater misery.

The League of Arab States must be commended for occupying the front lines that pursue these two objectives. We also sympathize with that organization's initiative to seek what is termed an "Arab solution" to the crisis. Our delegation is prepared to accompany the League of Arab States in the fulfilment of said solution, whose prime objective is humanitarian in nature, but whose broader goal is viewed in the framework of a firm and longer-term political solution. Some question whether this initiative is realistic, given the immediate rejection it provoked from the Government of the Arab Republic of Syria, but for our part we are willing to give the League of Arab States the opportunity to pursue its initiative within a predetermined time frame.

Should this initiative not bear fruit, we believe that, whether we like it or not, we would be failing in our obligation if we were to permit an already grave situation to deteriorate even further, with the foreseeable domestic and international repercussions on peace and security. We are more than aware of the serious dilemmas to which this gives rise. Non-intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign States and respect for their territorial integrity are cardinal principles of our foreign policy, but we also acknowledge the obligation of all States to observe certain norms of conduct in relations to their own populations.

We understand that peacefully expressed popular demands cannot be equated with a Government that uses force to address those demands. That is why, in an era when the principle of the responsibility to protect is being called into question, we are not ashamed to affirm that, with some nuances that we have explained in other forums, we support that principle. Our position is far from inviting interventions; what we demand is the strict observation of the norms of conduct to which I have referred. In its absence, Governments that flagrantly violate those norms naturally expose themselves to the consequences, whose precise shape and scope are susceptible to a wide spectrum of possibilities.

In summary, we appeal to all parties to make a last effort to find a way out of the Syrian crisis. The initiative of the League of Arab States, or variants

thereof, offer the potential for such a way out. Should it fail, the escalation of violence, which has assumed dramatic proportions in recent days, has not left many options to this Council to carry out its own responsibility in accordance with the Charter.

Mr. Portas (Portugal): I thank you, Mr. President, for having organized this important meeting. I wish to welcome His Excellency Sheikh Hamad Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Qatar, and Mr. Nabil Elaraby, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, to the Council. I would also like to thank them for their comprehensive and very useful briefings, and commend them both for their tireless efforts to resolve the crisis in Syria.

I decided to participate in this meeting of the Security Council for the simple reason that what is happening in Syria is of such seriousness; that the inaction of the international community is so shocking; that an Arab solution is so urgent; and that a decision of the United Nations is so essential that I felt compelled to participate in this debate and to do whatever I can to transform deadlock into solution, hesitation into will.

The situation in Syria is both unacceptable and untenable. For 10 months now, we have witnessed the most brutal repression of civilians and the most flagrant and systematic violation of their fundamental human rights. The brutality of the Syrian authorities has left in its wake thousands of dead and many more thousands maimed, imprisoned and tortured. They have shown their contempt for basic human rights and their unwillingness to protect their population. According to UNICEF, nearly 400 children have lost their lives in Syria. This is indeed a measure of the atrocities committed.

The only aspiration of the Syrian people, inspired by their brethren in other Arab countries, was simply to voice their protest and to pave the way for a democratic society. They did so peacefully and unarmed, only to be met by bullets, beatings and arrests. These victims and their families merit our full solidarity. As deadly violence goes on unabated, the situation in Syria continues to spiral dangerously towards civil war, with serious risks for peace and security in the region.

And yet, the Security Council has not been able to fully meet its responsibilities regarding Syria and the Syrian people, or to play its role as the primary body entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security. Allow me to be clear. The argument voiced during these 10 months that the choice in Syria was between inaction or civil war does not hold, given what we see, hear and read every day. The country is descending into civil war. The real option now is between an escalation of the conflict or a controlled and negotiated political solution.

Portugal fully supports the efforts of the League of Arab States to find a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis that both promotes the end of violence and the implementation of a serious political process that will establish a free and democratic Syria. We have commended the deployment of the Arab observer mission and the decision to extend its mandate. Notwithstanding the deployment of the mission, the regime continues with its violent oppression against peaceful voices of dissent and its widespread, systematic and gross violations of human rights, as documented by the commission of inquiry of the Human Rights Council.

The Commission's accounts are horrifying, and all those responsible for these brutal violations and abuses must be held accountable. We were appalled by the killing last week of an official of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. We must reiterate, firmly, that the deliberate targeting of humanitarian personnel is simply a form of barbarism.

By persistently ignoring numerous appeals to put an end to its bloody crackdown, the Syrian authorities have fuelled escalation and violence. Yet, even under the repression they are subject to, we trust that the Syrian opposition movement will maintain the peaceful nature of its legitimate objectives.

I cannot adequately stress the urgency of an immediate end to all violence. Equally pressing is the undertaking of a serious political process leading to a democratic, plural political system where all citizens, regardless of affiliation, ethnicity or belief, are treated equally and can fulfil their legitimate aspirations.

Some months ago, President Al-Assad announced reforms. Yet, he did not fulfil either those promises or his commitments to the Arab League. In situations of that nature, the old principle that it is enough to change only a few things so that everything stays the same is inapplicable. Quite to the contrary, the lesson of history is the following: Where there is no reform, there will be revolution.

Portugal remains committed to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria. The longer the crisis persists, the deeper the scars on Syrian society will be.

My country values highly the role of regional organizations and their contributions to peace and security. We believe that the League of Arab States is best suited to lead the efforts aimed at solving a crisis that entails direct risks and threats to many of its member States.

As I said, we fully support the efforts of the League of Arab States. We supported without hesitation the request for this meeting. We have staunchly supported the League's decision of 22 January and the political road map therein as the only viable path towards establishing a credible political dialogue among all Syrians, leading to a peaceful political transition.

We urge all Syrian parties, factions and stakeholders to respond positively to that proposal. Portugal fully subscribes to the need for the formation of a national unity Government and strongly appeals to President Al-Assad to delegate full authority to his deputy in order to carry out a peaceful political transition in accordance with what has been underlined by the Prime Minister of Qatar.

To cut a long story short, Portugal appeals to all members of the Council not to look at Syria with the eyes of the past, in the light of old divisions. What is at stake in Syria is an Arab initiative for a problem that is, first and foremost, an Arab one. It is a crisis that the world and the United Nations cannot ignore. All members of the Council should feel comfortable with the initiative of the Arab League because no member of the Council is comfortable with the daily massacres in Syria.

Inaction is not only unacceptable but also irresponsible. It is high time to live up to our responsibilities and to address the legitimate demands of the Syrian people and the expectations of the countries of the region. We must unite behind a strong and clear message to the Syrian authorities. It is also the credibility of the Security Council that is at stake. We must tell the Syrian authorities, unequivocally, that the killing must stop and that a political solution must be sought, based on the proposals of the Arab League.

It is for those reasons that Portugal commends Morocco for submitting a draft resolution with those objectives in view. We will continue to engage in good faith with all Council members in order to expeditiously adopt the draft resolution. The situation in Syria has already brought serious disruption to its neighbours. I wish, in that context, to express my country's deep appreciation for the assistance that countries of the region — Turkey in particular — have been providing to those fleeing violence, persecution and repression.

But let us be clear. If we do not act, not only will we be condemning the Syrian people to yet more violence and repression; we will be increasing the threats to the peace and security of the whole region. There is no more time to lose.

A year ago, the people of Tunisia set in motion a wave that quickly changed the face of the Arab world. After decades of silence and dread, ordinary people broke away from the shackles of fear. They found their voice, bravely took to the streets and made themselves heard. They strove for freedom, for equality and for their rights to build a democratic State and to citizenship. They refused to cower in submission. Those are also the aspirations of the Syrian people, who also refuse to submit to disproportionate brutal force.

President Roosevelt included among his four famous freedoms the freedom from fear. It is our duty to help the Syrian people to free themselves from the fear inflicted daily upon them. To put a stop to the killings and allow for a peaceful solution, we must act and we must act now. As Dostoyevsky said, "to live without hope is to cease to live". It is up to us to give hope to and protect the lives of the Syrian people.

Mr. Amrani (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, let me thank you, Sir, for convening this important meeting of the Security Council. My thanks go also to the other members of the Council for providing Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, head of the Arab Ministerial Committee on Syria, and His Excellency Mr. Nabil Elaraby, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, with the opportunity to enlighten the Council on the tragic situation in Syria and on the League's determined efforts to address the crisis.

My delegation has listened carefully to the two briefings on the crisis in sisterly Syria and the consequences of a confrontation that has claimed innocent lives, led to the severe suffering of civilians

and caused the displacement of families within Syria or to neighbouring countries.

We have noted in particular that the two Arab officials have stressed the importance, utility and viability of the Arab initiative for addressing the situation in Syria and laying the ground for a solution based on dialogue and national reconciliation and concord. We have also noted their emphasis on calling upon Council members to endorse the Arab plan and extend to it the support necessary to ensure its earliest possible implementation in order to end the increasingly painful situation in Syria. We express our sincere hope that the Security Council will support the Arab plan, allowing Syria to regain its national harmony, tranquillity and stability.

The phenomenon now commonly called the Arab Spring has highlighted the aspirations of Arab peoples to entrench democracy and respect for human rights and to live in dignity and social justice. The Arab countries have responded to those legitimate demands according to their respective specificities, abilities and experience. Building on their active solidarity with those aspirations, the Arab countries have contributed when necessary, through the League of Arab States or subregional groupings, to resolving intractable crises, which cannot be likened to interference in the internal affairs of the concerned countries. Such involvement has been undertaken in accordance with the provisions of the United Nations Charter, which calls on regional organizations to strive to prevent conflicts and their escalation and to seek their resolution by available peaceful means, without prejudice to the primary responsibility of the Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Thus, in view of the escalating situation in Syria and the thousands of victims felled, the widening confrontations and the absence of dialogue between the parties, the League of Arab States took the initiative to stop the bloodshed by sending a team of observers to monitor the Syrian Government's implementation of its commitments and to protect unarmed Syrian civilians.

Morocco was among the first countries to contribute to the Arab League's observer mission, which had access to areas where confrontations had been taking place. Morocco kept its observers in the field until the end of last week, despite the difficulties and obstacles they faced in fulfilling their humanitarian mission.

In that regard, while we applaud the efforts made by the members of the mission, who worked devotedly under very difficult and dangerous conditions, we fully understand the motivations and reasons that led the States of the Gulf Cooperation Council to withdraw their own observers from the mission. We also consider the decision of the League of Arab States to suspend the mission as being fully justified. That decision was prompted by the dangerous escalation of the situation and by Syria's choice of the security option, which has claimed an increasing number of victims.

We believe that the mission afforded a good opportunity to establish conditions conducive to the calm required to turn the page and begin a new period free of violence. However, the Council of the Arab League, at its ministerial meeting of 22 January, concluded in its assessment that Syria's implementation of some of its commitments was insufficient.

The presentation of the report of the observer mission (S/2012/71, enclosure 4) has coincided with a very serious escalation of violence and an unprecedented increase in the number of victims, including children and sometimes entire families. That led the League of Arab States to reassess the situation and launch an Arab initiative that addresses all aspects of the crisis. It is a political approach based on the non-use of force, dialogue, the formation of a national unity Government and preparations for democratic elections.

It is worth recalling that, during all phases of the Arab endeavours, the Arab countries have consistently stressed the following cardinal principles. The first involves the immediate and full cessation of all acts of violence and use of force, as well as the promotion of political dialogue. The second principle is to allow the Syrian people to fulfil their legitimate aspirations to build their national institutions. The third is to preserve Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the cohesiveness of its pluralistic society. Finally, the fourth principle is to exclude any foreign military intervention.

In accordance with paragraph 7 of the latest decision of the Council of the Arab League, taken at its ministerial meeting of 22 January, and in its capacity as the Arab member of the Security Council, Morocco has introduced a draft resolution that enjoys the support of Member States both inside and outside the Security Council.

The objective of the draft in particular is to seek Security Council endorsement of the road map adopted by the Arab League in order to reach a political solution to the crisis in Syria. It also seeks the Council's support for Arab decisions aimed at ending all acts of violence and the bloodshed in Syria.

We sincerely hope that negotiations on the draft will produce consensus in the Security Council that gives impetus to the launching of a political process involving both the Syrian Government and the opposition, through serious and responsible dialogue that leads to a new era in the great history of our brotherly Syrian people.

Mr. Link (Germany): I would like first to thank His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani and His Excellency Mr. Nabil Elaraby for their briefings. I commend the efforts of the League of Arab States towards resolving the crisis in Syria. It was important for the Council to listen to them today.

The Arab Spring has demonstrated that the people of the region want to shape their future peacefully through negotiations and discussions, not at gunpoint and not in an atmosphere of fear and violence.

More than 10 months have passed since events in Deraa and Damascus sparked peaceful protests in Syria against the Assad regime. The regime reacted with a brutal crackdown on its own people that has left thousands dead and is still ongoing. That violence must stop immediately. The Syrian people have been calling for freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly and the ability to freely choose their leaders. President Al-Assad has been responding by sending his tanks.

The Arab League has heeded the calls of the people of the region. Three months ago, it elaborated a working plan to resolve the crisis, to which the Syrian Government committed. However, the Al-Assad regime did not substantially comply with the agreement. There was no cessation of violence, not all of those arrested were released, and there was no withdrawal of the military from the cities and residential areas. On the contrary, there has been a notable increase in the regime's violence over the past few days. That has forced the observer mission to suspend its activities. The country stands at the brink of civil war, with implications for peace and stability in the region. The Council has been silent too long. It has to step up to its responsibilities.

We must not forget that the majority of the demonstrations in Syria have been overwhelmingly peaceful, whereas the reaction of the authorities has been excessive. Those facts have been recorded by the international commission of inquiry established by the Human Rights Council. That is why we also advocate a Security Council commission of inquiry.

As the report of the commission of inquiry (A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1) concludes, the systematic human rights violations perpetrated by the Syrian regime have been conducted pursuant to deliberate State policy. Members of the Syrian military and security forces may have committed crimes against humanity.

On 22 January, the Arab League set out a political framework for the way forward that includes the formation of a transitional Government. The Arab League has turned to this Council to ask for support. We hereby lend our voice to its demands, and we fully support its plan and all its previous efforts. We must seize this opportunity. Now is the time for the Security Council to act. The draft resolution endorsing the demands made by the Arab League is on the table. The text is the product of fruitful cooperation between members of this Council and Arab countries, and was introduced to the Council by Morocco. It has Germany's full support.

We have to work for a political solution with regional ownership. We owe it to the Syrian people not to close our eyes in the face of the ongoing repression. It is our responsibility as members of the Security Council. Countries all over the world, especially those of the region, have expressed their support. Let us act. Above all, let us act without further delay.

Mr. Haroon (Pakistan): At the outset, let me extend a very warm welcome to His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, Prime Minister of Qatar, and His Excellency Mr. Nabil Elaraby, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, and thank them for sparing their valuable time to brief the Council.

Pakistan enjoys long-standing and close brotherly relations with all members of the League of Arab States. That relationship is underpinned by a common heritage and shared values. We greatly value the role of regional organizations such as the League of Arab States in promoting the cause of peace and development. We also support regional processes leading to the peaceful resolution of disputes. That is a good example for the United Nations. We therefore highly appreciate

the efforts of the Qatari Prime Minister and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

By seizing the moment and by deploying the observer mission, the League of Arab States has indeed proved that great strides can be made in the resolution of regional issues through regional mechanisms. We hope that the efforts of the League will bear fruit through the return of peace and normalcy to Syria through a process of dialogue and negotiation and without any resort to force and coercion.

The security situation in Syria continues to be a source of serious concern to us all. The reports of continuing violence and bloodshed cannot and should not be taken lightly by anyone. We strongly condemn the use of force against any peaceful protesters. The killing and injuring of innocent people must stop. We call on both sides to shun violence, pursue the path of dialogue and reconciliation, and engage in a results-oriented and inclusive political process leading to the peaceful resolution of the problem.

We must be mindful of the fact that whatever we decide in this Chamber in the coming days will have long-term implications not only in Syria, but in the Middle East as a whole. That region can ill afford further instability. The situation therefore requires a collective analysis towards obtaining a solution.

We also want to emphasize that while we in the Security Council are and should remain the upholders of the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter, the discussion must remain in full cognizance of and respect for the independence, unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. It also should remain within the framework of Chapter VI of the Charter and the principles of the pacific settlement of disputes.

We support the Arab League's efforts, including the deployment of observers. We also commend and support the services rendered by members of the observer mission, who are performing their duties to the best of their abilities despite working in difficult and sometimes dangerous circumstances.

We take hope for peace from the words of the Prime Minister of Qatar in his capacity as Chairman of the Arab Ministerial Committee on Syria when he says that we are not calling for a military intervention and that we are not for a regime change either, for that is a matter that is up to the Syrian people to decide. All that, in reaffirmation of the sovereignty and integrity of Syria, was also voiced by Secretary-General Elaraby and reiterated by the French and British representatives. I am hopeful that that will be explicitly and adequately reflected in the draft resolution being brought before the Council. We hope that other members of the Council will join us in commending the Arab League. We also hope that the mission will continue its work.

Let me be absolutely clear. All the grief vented in the Council might result in fruition only if we swiftly, with cohesion and consideration, replace mere rhetoric. Therefore I conclude by saying that, in terms of the Council's action, we should strive to achieve consensus, for a unanimous message will always be better and essential to promote our objectives and peace in Syria.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We welcome the initiative of the League of Arab States for the convening of today's meeting with the participation of the Prime Minister of Qatar and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

Today we meet at a crucial moment, which is perhaps the last opportunity to break the vicious circle of violence into which Syria and its people have been sucked. Worsening of the crisis and its plunging into the chaos of a full-scale conflict would not only be a tragedy for the Syrian people, but would also inevitably destabilize the neighbouring countries and further stir up the strategically important region of the Middle East.

What is the solution? What can the international community do to prevent a fatal development of events? The answer is as complex as it is simple. Security Council members found the key to it essentially at the beginning of the crisis, when on 3 August 2011 it adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2011/16). In it are two fundamental provisions: violence by all sides must cease, and the crisis can be resolved only through a Syrian-led inclusive political process. If all key players of the international community had concentrated their efforts on implementing these provisions, then, we are convinced, the crisis would have long since been overcome. Unfortunately, this has not been the case.

Russia, which for years has enjoyed close and friendly partnerships with the Syrian people and the Arab world, fought from the very beginning to ensure that the Syrian people would be able to define for themselves, without bloodshed and violence, a course and a format for the necessary social, economic and political transformations. We are convinced that at a

time of extreme internal political crisis, the role of the international community should not be to exacerbate conflict or meddle by using economic sanctions or military force. Instead, it should foster dialogue to seek an optimally effective and smooth resolution.

With a view to halting the violence and establishing a Syrian-led inclusive political process, Russia has stepped up its diplomatic efforts with Damascus, the Syrian opposition and the League of Arab States. In our view, the League has an important role, with the international community, in resolving the Syrian crisis. Russia did much to ensure that the League and Damascus agreed on the deployment of the League's monitoring mission in Syria.

At the first stage of its work the mission was already playing a useful role from the standpoint of lowering the violence somewhat, so that — and this is of key importance — there was more objective information on the nature of the events unfolding in Syria, in spite of pressures on the mission. In the mission's report on the results of its work between 24 December and 18 January 2012 (S/2012/71, annex, enclosure 4), it is clearly confirmed that in a number of Syrian neighbourhoods armed elements are attacking Syrian security forces and peaceful civilians. That led to the conclusion that all sides in Syria, not just the Government, must take on obligations to cease all forms of violence.

We know from different sources what is going on in Syria. For example, after the city of Zabadani came under the control of fighters, murders, looting and beatings began. The country residence of the Russian ambassador was looted. Some thousand peaceful residents deserted the city.

It should be noted that the last section of the mission's report contains a conclusion that a dialogue among the various Syrian sides should run in parallel with the mission's work, and there must be a political process as well.

The fraternal ties that we enjoy with the League of Arab States allow us not only to support our Arab friends, but also, when necessary, to criticize them for inconsistencies. We did not conceal our belief that the League's decision to suspend the membership of Damascus and to impose sanctions on Syria was counterproductive. The League's position with respect to the monitoring mission could have been more firm. On the one hand, the League decided to continue the mission; on the other, some countries have begun withdrawing their observers.

We are concerned with the recent decision to suspend the work of the mission. As we understand, according to the mission's leadership, this was a consequence of a recent burst of violence and of a fatwa broadcast on a Saudi television station by a Salafi preacher of Syrian origin, giving his blessing to spilling the blood of observers. We think that the work of the mission in the near future should continue, with appropriate support from all sides.

Of particular importance in the context of efforts to settle the crisis is the League's initiative of 22 January 2012 to call on the Syrian Government and all Syrian opposition groups to join in dialogue under the League's aegis. Engaging with one's opponents should not be the duty of diplomats only, but also of politicians, especially when the fate of one's country is at stake.

Russia continues to act in unison with the League. We appeal to the Syrian authorities and all opposition groups to send their representatives to Moscow at a mutually agreed time for informal contacts, without preconditions. This would allow the Syrian parties to discuss many issues on the national agenda without any limitations, including the task of preparing an inter-Syrian dialogue under the aegis of the League of Arab States.

Now it is more important than ever to engage in a dialogue that leads to a necessary agreement on the political future of the country. Can the Security Council play a constructive role here? We think so. That is why on 15 December 2011 the Russian delegation submitted to the Council a draft resolution, which drew on the political thrust of the presidential statement of 3 August (S/PRST/2011/16). The draft received a measure of support in the Council. We circulated an updated version among our colleagues yesterday.

We suggest that in drawing up its decision the Council should be guided by the principle of causing no harm. We reject any sanctions, any attempts to employ the Council's instruments to fuel conflict or to justify any eventual foreign military interference. But that is not the only matter at hand. The Council cannot impose parameters for an internal political settlement. The Charter gives it no such authority. The sides must be encouraged to engage in dialogue rather than be intimidated into doing so.

We therefore have taken into account the draft resolution presented recently by the delegation of Morocco. We found some of the elements of the text of our draft in it. This gives rise to hope. A consensus position among Council members on Syria is not only possible, but necessary.

Mr. Li Baodong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I welcome to our meeting His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, and the Ambassador of Syria. I welcome their briefings to the Council.

Syria is an important country in the Middle East. Its stability affects the security and stability of the entire Middle East region. Like other members of the Security Council, China has closely followed the developments in Syria.

China is of the view that the Syrian people's request for reform and safeguarding their interests should be respected. It is imperative to put an immediate end to all violence in Syria and to stop the killing of innocent civilians. At the same time, an inclusive political process for the wide participation of all Syrian parties must be started without delay, to speed up reform and resolve differences and disputes peacefully through dialogue and consultations, so as to restore stability to Syria and to enable it to embark on the path of all-around development.

We believe that Syria and its people are capable and resourceful enough to find a way to resolve their issues and to find a political system and a degree of economic growth suited to Syria's national conditions. The international community can play a positive and constructive role in this regard and can provide assistance for a peaceful political settlement of the Syrian issue through dialogue.

Syria is a member of the Arab world. China hopes to see a proper settlement of the Syrian crisis within the framework of the Arab League. We support the League's efforts to seek a political solution of the Syrian issue and to maintain stability in the region. We hope to see the success of its mediation efforts.

The Arab League observer mission plays a significant role in helping the international community learn about the real situation in Syria. We attach importance to the report submitted by the that observer mission (S/2012/71, annex, enclosure 4). We hope the mission will continue to fulfil its mandate and carry out objective and impartial investigations. We call on the Syrian Government and other parties concerned to provide full cooperation to the mission in that regard.

China has repeatedly stressed that the actions of the Security Council on the Syrian issue should comply with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, help ease tensions in Syria, promote political dialogue and defuse disputes, and help maintain peace and stability in the Middle East region.

In the meantime, China has consistently taken a cautious approach to sanctions. Sanctions, rather than assistance in resolving an issue, often lead to further complications of the situation. We firmly oppose the use of force to resolve the Syrian issue, as well as practices, such as forcibly pushing for regime change, that violate the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and the basic norms that govern international relations.

China supports the draft resolution proposed by Russia on the Syrian issue and takes note of the new text that has been distributed by Morocco in the Security Council. China is ready to act in accordance with the aforementioned principled position, to engage actively and constructively in consultations, and to work with all parties concerned to push for an appropriate settlement of the Syrian issue through peaceful dialogue.

Mr. Musayev (Azerbaijan): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Sir, for convening this meeting. We are grateful to the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the State of Qatar, His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, and to the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, His Excellency Mr. Nabil Elaraby, as well as to the Permanent Representative of Syria, His Excellency Mr. Bashar Ja'afari, for their briefings.

Azerbaijan is deeply concerned by the continuing destabilization and widespread violence in Syria, which have led to the death of many people. On 3 August 2011, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2011/16) condemning the widespread violations of human rights and the use of force against civilians by the Syrian authorities. The Council, inter alia, called for an immediate end to all violence and urged all sides to act with the utmost restrain and to refrain from reprisals, including attacks against State

institutions. Related resolutions were adopted also by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

Despite all those steps and repeated calls of the international community, the situation in Syria continued to deteriorate, causing scores of deaths and injuries. The suicide terrorist attacks that occurred in Damascus on 23 December 2011 and 6 January 2012, which the Security Council condemned in the strongest terms, were a striking illustration of dangerous escalation with unpredictable consequences.

From very beginning, Azerbaijan has supported the efforts of the League of Arab States. We look forward to their continuation with a view to ending the violence, overcoming the crisis and achieving stabilization by peaceful means and through dialogue. We pay tribute to the League's observer mission to Syria and to all its members for fulfilling their functions in the face of complex challenges. It should be noted that the Mission's presence in Syria had some positive effects and that it contributed to addressing a number of issues. We note with regret that, under the circumstances, the League was compelled to suspend its mission, and we hope it will resume its function soon.

As the Security Council pointed out in its presidential statement of 3 August 2011, the only solution to the crisis in Syria is through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process, with the aim of effectively addressing the legitimate aspirations and concerns of the Syrian people. That process should include democratic and free elections and enable the participation of all political forces of the country.

It is indisputable that unity and a coordinated approach within the Security Council are vital if it is to fulfil its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Proceeding from this understanding, Azerbaijan has been and continues to be supportive of and open to timely consultations with all members of the Security Council on initiatives concerning the situation in Syria. We look forward to constructive dialogue and discussions on the relevant draft proposals, as well as to the report of the League Arab States observer mission, and we believe in achieving the compromise that will contribute to ongoing efforts aimed at overcoming the crisis in Syria and at putting an end to human suffering there.

It is clear that the international community must not only demand certain steps from the Syrian Government, but also focus its efforts on persuading the opposition to reciprocate. Only measures adequate to the situation, that conform with Chapter VI of the United Nations Charter and pay due regard to the role of the League of Arab States, can be considered.

Whatever the differences, it is crucial that obligations with respect to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Syria and all other States of the region be fully observed and respected. We note the position unambiguously expressed in that regard by the Security Council and the General Assembly, as well as by the League of Arab States, which in its Council resolution on Syria of 22 January 2012 supported efforts towards ending the Syrian crisis without foreign intervention.

Mr. Menan (Togo) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to thank the Chairman of the Ministerial Committee on Syria of the League of Arab States, His Excellency the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, as well as the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, for their briefings to the Council, as well as for the praiseworthy efforts that they continue to undertake to bring peace to Syria.

Since mid-March 2011, Syria has experienced a serious crisis, with adverse impacts on neighbouring countries that are hosting thousands of refugees. The observer mission to Syria, deployed by the League of Arab States on 26 December 2011, sought to put an end to the repression of protesters and to bring all forms of violence, whatever their source, to a halt. Unfortunately, the violence, far from being rooted out, continues. Until recently, we spoke of protesters with bare hands; today they have become a rebellion, having begun to take up arms.

Faced with such a situation, it is hardly surprising that the mission of the League of Arab States did not achieve the expected results and that the mission itself had to be suspended. My country deplores the fact that the members of the mission were unable to conduct their work freely and without hindrance. Even worse, the violence continued while the mission was still on the ground.

Togo condemns the violence, murders, kidnappings, extrajudicial executions, rapes and violations of human rights that have been perpetrated in Syria. My country calls on the Syrian Government to put an end to the violence, lift the siege of certain neighbourhoods or cities, and order the military and its tanks to return to their barracks.

The League of Arab States has proposed a road map that includes the formation of a Government of national unity with the essential goal of preparing and convening general and presidential elections in the country in the near future. President Bashar al-Assad would transfer his mandate to the Vice-President, who would work with a Prime Minister elected by consensus and who would manage the transitional Government.

The implementation of the road map presupposes an end to the violence and engagement in honest, open and inclusive dialogue. However, this all depends on the goodwill of the Syria authorities in its implementation. Unfortunately, we have seen that the current Government is not prepared to step down, much less take part in the transition process as recommended by the road map. That is why Togo is concerned about the likelihood of the implementation of the League of Arab States' far-reaching road map, elaborated in the framework of Chapter VI of the Charter.

Could the Security Council not take action on this initiative — the outcome of the efforts of a regional organization authorized to propose ways of ending the crisis — without being accused of supporting the violence? On the other hand, could the Council, given the current situation, call upon the President of Syria to step down, without being accused of supporting one of the parties to the conflict? This body, which is responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, must be able to engage in honest and heartfelt discussions so as to arrive at the best way to help Syria find a way out of the difficult situation facing its people, a situation that the delegation of Togo believes has gone on for far too long.

However, at this stage it is imperative that the violence stop. The Council must speak with a unified voice, leaving aside narrow interests, and launch an urgent appeal to the Syrian authorities to stop the spiral of violence. Togo believes it is now utterly clear that we must not put in the same category acts of violence perpetrated by the Government and those of protesters. Nevertheless, so as to ensure that peace and the inclusive dialogue we are hoping to see remain possible, the Syrian opposition must stand by its initial approach of achieving democracy without violence.

Togo believes that the endeavours of the Arab League should be supported and that it should be encouraged to make greater efforts to bring about a rapprochement between the Syrian regime and the opposition, with a view to enabling direct negotiations. Such negotiations should be held under the auspices of the Arab League and with the support of the United Nations, with a view to finding a lasting solution to the crisis and thereby averting the potential civil war that looms on the horizon.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri (India): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having organized this meeting at the request of the League of Arab States. I also take this opportunity to welcome in our midst today the Chair of the League's Ministerial Council, the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani; and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Mr. Nabil Elaraby. I would like to thank them for their comprehensive briefings on the League's efforts to resolve the crisis in Syria. I would also like to thank the Permanent Representative of Syria for his statement.

The participation in the Council's deliberations this afternoon by the Secretary of State of the United States of America, the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of France, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guatemala, the Minister of State and Foreign Relations of the Republic of Portugal, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Morocco and the Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office of Germany testifies to the importance of the discussions and also deserves our great appreciation.

Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter provides for the Council's cooperation with the regional organizations for the maintenance of international peace and security. In that context, we welcome today's meeting and think that it provides us with a good opportunity to understand the role that the League of Arab States is playing in the resolution of the problem in Syria.

The Syrian Arab Republic has historically played an important role in the Middle East by virtue of its geographic and strategic location, its diversity and the genius of its people. Developments in Syria have implications for peace and stability in the wider region. We have therefore called for a peaceful and inclusive political process to address the grievances of all sections of Syrian society since the beginning of the

protests in March 2011. The problem in Syria is not merely security-related; it is primarily political and economic and emanates from the Syrian people's desire to play a greater role in shaping their destiny. The resolution of this problem cannot be found in violence or armed struggle and its violent suppression. Nor can a solution be reached through prescriptions from outside. The Syrian people demand and deserve empowerment, so that a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political solution can be found in an atmosphere free of violence and bloodshed.

Unfortunately, during the past 10 months we have witnessed an increasing level of violence that has taken a heavy toll on civilians and the security forces and has destroyed civilian infrastructure. We unequivocally and strongly condemn all violence, irrespective of its perpetrators, no matter what justifications are proffered. We also condemn all violations of human rights and of the rights of expression and peaceful assembly. India holds those rights among the fundamental values that should be respected while ensuring the stability and security of society. India, along with its IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa) partners, conveyed this message clearly to the Syrian leadership when an IBSA delegation visited Damascus in August 2011. That message was also contained in the presidential statement issued by the Security Council in August 2011 (S/PRST/2011/16), under India's presidency.

We see the efforts of the League of Arab States in Syria in the light of our own support for a political resolution of the crisis. We had noted that the deployment of the League's observer mission across several areas of the country had had a calming effect, and we are disappointed that the mission was suspended on 28 January owing to deteriorating security conditions and continuing violence. The report of the observer mission (see S/2012/71, enclosure 4) that the League has made available to the Security Council clearly states that there is an armed element to the opposition, which is also responsible for a number of violent acts. The continued presence and deployment of the observers could have helped reduce the violence and present a more accurate picture of developments, especially since the monitors had also confirmed that a great deal of information in the media is exaggerated and misleading. The report of the observer mission also made an important point: that the mission needs to be accompanied by a political process to address the grievances of the Syrian people, something that we strongly support.

We are firmly of the view that all sides need to cooperate with the League of Arab States. A political process must begin without any further delay. The process should be led by the Syrians and should respect Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. The League of Arab States, as an important regional organization, should play its required and historical role in promoting political dialogue among the Syrian parties. That dialogue can build upon the package of political reforms already announced by the Syrian leadership and also bring about the necessary changes to that package, so that it can find acceptance among all segments of Syrian society. The outcome of this dialogue cannot be prejudged. The outcome should also be acceptable to the widest segment of Syrian society if it is to resolve the present crisis and be enduring.

The international community, including the Security Council, should play a constructive role in the process of political dialogue among the Syrians. In this context, we welcome the submission of a draft resolution to the Security Council. We will engage with fellow Council members so that the Council can speak with a unanimous voice in support of the initiative of the League of Arab States to expeditiously resolve the Syrian crisis.

Mr. Osorio (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to welcome Their Excellencies the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, who have come to the Council today to make their contribution to our consideration of the situation in Syria. The terms in which they have appealed to the Council to shoulder its responsibilities deserve our full respect. I believe it is highly significant that we have with us the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Guatemala, Portugal, Morocco and Germany.

Colombia attaches the greatest importance to this meeting of the Security Council because we believe that together we can work to create conditions conducive to finding a political solution to the crises in Syria and try to put an end to the unjustified repression and violence inflicted on the country for more than 10 months.

Respect for individual freedom and the protection of the fundamental rights of all citizens are the responsibility of all Governments. The Syrian authorities

have the duty to fulfil their responsibilities under international law and to ensure the protection and respect of the human rights of the population as they set about restoring social order and stability. Colombia condemns and rejects the violent crackdown on demonstrations by civilians exercising their right to free association, free expression and peaceful assembly. We are therefore alarmed at the ongoing deterioration of the situation in Syria, the wanton violence and the death toll, with more than 5,000 lives lost in the protracted crisis.

We favour regional initiatives in quest of a peaceful solution to situations that may jeopardize the maintenance of peace and security. We therefore support the efforts of the League of Arab States to provide a political solution to the situation in Syria. As we have mentioned previously, a long-term solution requires a process led by Syrians, taking into account the legitimate aspirations of the people and the various political actors, and respecting Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity. We regret the fact, expressed in the report of the Arab League's observer mission (S/2012/71, annex, enclosure 4), that the actions of the Government have been insufficient for the effective fulfilment of the commitments the Syrian Government undertook with the League. It is also regrettable that, given the resurgence of violence and the lack of guarantees for its safety, the mission had to suspend its activities.

Concerning the draft resolution submitted by Morocco on Friday, 27 January, my delegation considers the text to be an apt response to the Arab League's concern that the Council endorse elements of the League's plan, and we lend it our full support. The gravity of the circumstances demands a pronouncement by the Council that will help create a basis and conditions for the restoration of order and the implementation of the institutional reforms necessary to end the violence and to reach an understanding leading to peace in the country.

My delegation believes — and all members of the Council agree — that the Arab plan contains elements that could lead to an accord, such as the call on the Syrian Government and all the various opposition groups to enter into a genuine political dialogue; an end to all violence, no matter on whose part, so as to protect the civilian population in Syria; the release of those detained in the course of recent events; and access for relevant agencies of the League and Arab and international media to establish the facts.

Colombia hopes that a consensus on those worthy proposals will be possible and that the Council will adopt a decision inspired by the guiding principle of the United Nations — the maintenance of international peace and security.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of South Africa.

South Africa expresses its appreciation to His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the State of Qatar, and His Excellency Mr. Nabil Elaraby, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, for their briefings to the Council today. We also thank the Permanent Representative of Syria for his briefing to the Council today.

South Africa is deeply concerned about the deteriorating political, security and humanitarian situation in Syria. We condemn the continued and violent loss of life in Syria and call for maximum restraint on the part of all the parties to the conflict. We emphasize that there is an urgent need for the violence to cease immediately. It is our hope that this situation will be resolved in a peaceful manner in accordance with the will of the Syrian people. We reiterate that any solution to the Syrian crisis should be Syrian-led, based on genuine national dialogue, devoid of any form of intimidation and free of interference from outside.

We urge the Syrian authorities to initiate an open, transparent and all-inclusive political process with its people to address their legitimate demands and in order to guarantee their fundamental political rights and freedoms, including their rights to freedom of assembly and speech. We also encourage the opposition to participate in this political process with a view to ensuring sustainable peace in Syria.

A comprehensive political solution must be found that will lead to political reform based on respect for democratic principles, rule of law, justice and human rights. It should also address the socio-economic development needs of the people of Syria in order to ensure long-term peace and stability.

We appreciate the League of Arab States' efforts aimed at achieving a peaceful resolution of the crisis in Syria. On 12 January, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2033 (2012), which focused

attention on enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations in the maintenance of international peace and security. South Africa therefore welcomes this engagement by the Council with the League of Arab States, which, due to its proximity and knowledge of the region, is able to play a meaningful role in assisting the Syrian people to overcome their challenges. We hope that this engagement will lead to a peaceful political solution to the conflict in Syria. We strongly believe that any solution should respect the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, and at the same time uphold the purposes and principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

We thank the Secretary-General of the Arab League for providing us with the report (S/2012/71, annex, enclosure 4) of the head of the League of Arab States observer mission to Syria, General Al-Dabi. The report, which is a first-hand account of developments on the ground, provides us with an invaluable assessment of the situation. As noted in the report, Syrian citizens also believe that the crisis should be resolved peacefully, through Arab intervention alone and without international intervention, as it would allow them to live in peace and complete the reform process and bring about the change they desire. It is imperative that there be an end to violence from all sides, as it is apparent from the observer mission report that the opposition is also armed. Consequently, civilians bear the brunt of the violence perpetrated by the Government and armed opposition groups.

The critical question at this juncture is what positive contribution we can make as the international community, and the Security Council in particular, to assist the Syrian parties to resolve their conflict. Any action we take should be geared towards bringing the parties towards a peaceful resolution of their conflict rather than widening the gap between them. We therefore welcome the Arab League's and all diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving the crisis in the country, and we encourage Syrian parties to explore all opportunities to find a political solution. We must avoid any action that may run the risk of further polarizing the parties and lead to an escalation of the violence.

Military intervention to resolve political conflicts, as we have seen in other parts of the world — most recently in the Libyan situation — has unintended consequences not only for the country in question but for the wider region. That is something the Middle East can ill afford.

We welcome the consideration of the situation in Syria through draft resolutions before the Council. We call for all the commitments and principles expressed by the delegations of the Arab League and others today to be better and more fully expressed in future drafts. South Africa shall engage constructively in those negotiations.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani to make a further statement.

Sheikh Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I apologize for asking to speak once again. I wish to note that our mission here is not to request military intervention from the Security Council or to take a decision in favour of military intervention. Moreover, we are not interfering in Syria's internal affairs. It is a matter for the Syrian people to decide who shall govern them.

I do, however, have a comment to make concerning the statement made by the representative of Syria. He referred to a poem by the late poet Nizar Qabbani. We all know that Nizar Qabbani was a bard of liberty, but we do not know what he would have to say about this situation if he were still alive. The representative of Syria talked about the colonialism under which the countries of the Gulf, especially Qatar, had suffered. Qatar was in fact never colonized but had signed a treaty with the United Kingdom that expired in the early 1970s, and had never had to resist colonialism because it and the other Gulf States lived in dire poverty until God blessed us with oil. Today, we are proud to stand by our Arab brothers who need our assistance, and we will help them without reminding them of our generosity.

I should also like to raise the question of democracy. We in no way wish to interfere; we wish to work alongside the Syrian people in implementing reforms and relaunching democracy. Democracy in Syria began in 1919, and we hope most earnestly that it will prevail once again and bless the entire Syrian people with its benefits.

With respect to Israel, we have no open front with that country, but our position is unequivocally

manifested in the support we extend to our Palestinian brothers, be they in Gaza or elsewhere. History will be the judge of that.

As for Iraq and the million who have died there, I recall that we all — including Syria, whom we thank — contributed to the liberation of Kuwait from the Iraqi occupation, and participated in all decisions taken by the Arab League and the Security Council.

As for Libya, almost 50,000 people have died there, and had Al-Qadhafi remained in power there would have been far more deaths. The League of Arab States adopted a resolution on that issue which Syria endorsed as well.

As to the statement made by the representative of the Russian Federation concerning Saudi Arabia, I note that the King of that country is a true Arab who has always demonstrated his concern for his fellow Arabs by giving priority to their interests and not his own. It was his sincerity that led him to withdraw his observers from Syria because he did not want to be a false witness to what was happening there.

The President: I give the floor to the Syrian Arab Republic to make a further statement.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is true that Syria participated in the liberation of Kuwait when the former Iraqi regime had made a bad decision. We never participated in the invasion of Iraq, however, or in the invasion of Libya. We have never been involved in a conspiracy against any Arab country.

I welcome the statement and clarifications made by the Prime Minister of Qatar. Some of his comments were accurate, but others were not. I would ask him, in the presence of Council members, whether Qatar is a member of NATO or of the League of Arab States? How is it that Qatar went to NATO's assistance in destroying Libya?

Some speakers have said that they would not move towards military intervention in Syria and that a decision of the Council would not necessarily lead to military intervention. That is all well and good, but can anyone assure us that what was done to Libya, Somalia, Iraq, the former Yugoslavia and Kosovo will not be repeated in the case of Syria?

At any rate, we are very sorry about the innocent victims. They were sons and daughters of our homeland. I am an Ambassador of the Syrian President, and proud to be here in that capacity. I am also the Ambassador of my people, and proud of that, too. I cannot speak here in any way that would constitute an attack on my own people or hurt them. The grief of others over the deaths of innocent victims can never equal that of ours in Syria. They are all innocent victims. We know that the blood that has been spilled cannot be recovered. We know that the sadness of the victims' families can never be assuaged.

I and the people whom I represent have the responsibility to ensure that the violence comes to an end, to protect Syria for all its inhabitants, and to save lives endangered by media incitement. We must also do nothing to exacerbate the situation or promote the smuggling of weapons across our borders or the hosting of an armed opposition and conferences in neighbouring countries. My country has sent dozens of letters containing detailed information on that subject.

Only two days ago, a British newspaper that I shall not name published an article written by their correspondent in Syria, stating that Qatar and Saudi Arabia had financed shipments of weapons to Syria. All Council members are aware that, unfortunately, there are other countries with which we had a close relationship before the current crisis. They are now sheltering armed opposition groups in their territories. The opposition is engaging in military operations along our borders, bombing our oil refineries and oil and gas pipelines. Trains transporting fuel oil were bombed during what is a very cold winter. The Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya networks should stop fanning the flames and thereby truly help to end the bloodshed.

In his briefing, the Prime Minister of Qatar mentioned that he would announce the decisions reached by the organization representing all Arabs. However, that organization is not currently speaking on behalf of all Arabs. Without Syria, there is no Arab League. We will never allow anyone to adopt a decision that undermines our fate and future on our behalf or without our participation.

The targeting of humanitarian workers is clearly a criminal act, as mentioned by the representative of Portugal, but perhaps he could tell us how he deduced that it was the Government authorities who had killed the doctor who was working for the Red Cross.

There is a neighbourhood in Damascus known as Al-Hariqa, which means "the fire". Do Council

members know why it was given that name? Surely not. It was thus named because in the 1940s French forces bombed it using air and artillery strikes, killing thousands of innocent civilians living there. That is how the neighbourhood gained its name, Al-Hariqa, which means "the fire".

The Syrian parliament building was also bombed, killing everyone inside except for one person, whom Syrians have come to call al-shahid al-hai — "the living martyr". To all of that we would add that 45,000 Algerians were killed in a single hour in the capital, Algiers, in 1945, because they unfortunately believed that the end of the Second World War, the defeat of Nazism and Fascism and the victory of the values associated with freedom could bring the Algerians independence.

A wise man once said to his son, "When you know where you came from, then you will know where you will end up." As the proverb says, a book can be judged by its cover. Intentionally or otherwise, that applies to the Arab League, which is trying to harm Syria and the whole Arab nation.

One day at the end of the nineteenth century, Emile Zola, the famous French writer whose work I like very much, defended a case in which a French army officer had suffered an injustice. He wrote a letter in French — with which I am familiar but have not spoken for some time — the French title of which is "J'accuse". Today, before the Council, I am quoting Emile Zola, in the sense that I say the same thing: "J'accuse". I accuse a few people, whom I will not name so as not to embarrass them. I accuse them of working to undermine Syria's stability and sovereignty and the unity of the Syrian people by incitement and fanning the flames.

In 2003, we opened our doors to 2 million Iraqi refugees who had fled the British and American invasion of Iraq. At the time, no one helped us shoulder the resulting economic burden. Subsequently, two or three years later, fully one third of the Lebanese population came to Syria after the Israeli aggression against them in 2006. No one helped us at that time. After that, economic cooperation with Turkey — our neighbour, which we hold in high regard — led to disastrous economic consequences for small-scale artisans in the countryside around Aleppo and Damascus. We had an economic partnership agreement with Turkey that cost us billions of dollars, and as a result, thousands of Syrian villagers lost their livelihoods.

The representative of India was right when he spoke of the economic reasons behind what is happening in Syria, but that is not our fault. Mistakes have been made, that is true. It is true that mistakes have been made; President Al-Assad has admitted as much. He drew up a road map designed to help us move beyond the crisis. He cannot do everything alone, however. He needs help from the Arab League, Turkey, brotherly nations and the Security Council.

When the Secretariat of the Arab League sent this document (S/2012/71, annex) to the Council, they said on the last page that there were other annexes, such as the Al-Dabi report, which would be sent by courier. Why will the Al-Dabi report be sent by courier later and why was it not included in the documents currently before the Council? Why was the Al-Dabi report not submitted with the extra annexes?

For our part, we have done all that is necessary. We sent a letter to the President of the Security Council outlining the main points of the Al-Dabi report. As Council members are aware, however, the Secretariat of the Arab League rejected the request made by some Council members to invite Mr. Al-Dabi to speak before the Council. I think that I have spoken quite enough.

The President: I give the floor to the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Elaraby (*spoke in Arabic*): I do not intend to enter into an argument. However, the Ambassador of Syria raised an issue that I feel compelled to clarify.

When you contacted me, Mr. President, you mentioned that some members wanted General Al-Dabi to attend this meeting. I said then that the Prime Minister of Qatar and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States would attend at the request of the Ministerial Council of the League of Arab States in order to inform the Council about what had happened. General Al-Dabi was not requested to appear before the Council; his job is on the field and his report is before the Council (S/2012/71, annex, enclosure 4).

The President: There are no further names inscribed on the list of speakers. I would like to express my delegation's appreciation to members of the Council, especially my colleagues, the Permanent Representatives, their respective staffs and the Council

secretariat for all the support that they have given us during South Africa's presidency this month of January.

Indeed, it was a busy month. We could not have done it alone and without the hard work, support and positive contributions of every delegation and representatives of the Secretariat, as well as the interpreters, translators, meetings services and sound engineers.

As we end our presidency, I know that I speak on behalf of the Council in wishing the Togolese delegation good luck for the month of February.

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 6.35 p.m.